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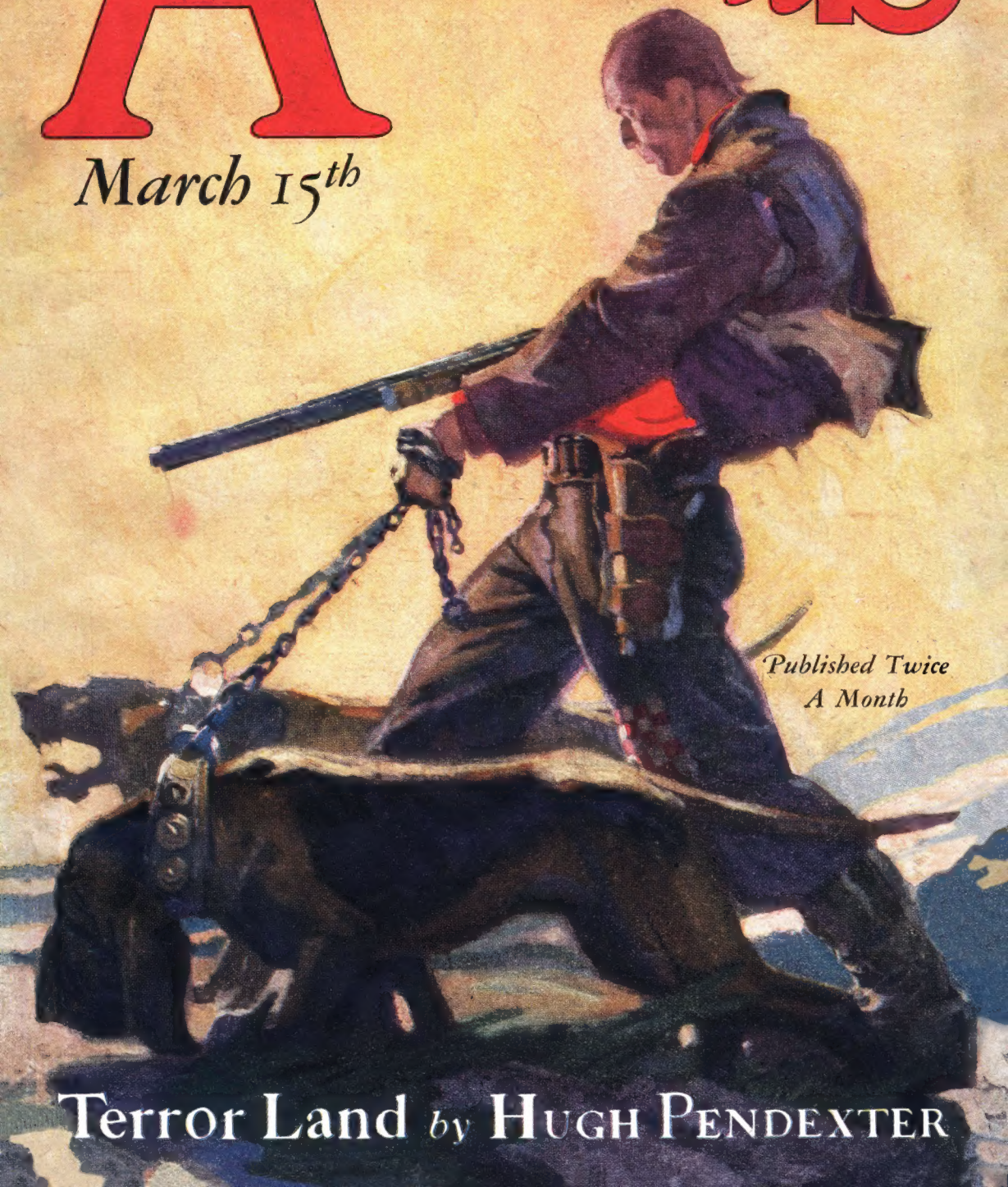

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LOST LEGIONS

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

By MALCOLM WHEELER-NICHOLSON

CHAPTER I

VLADIVOSTOK

FAR up ahead there was a burst of music. One could hear the differently keyed bugles of many nations sounding a variety of shrill notes. It was almost time for the big parade of the Allied forces to start through Vladivostok. Davies glanced back to where his battalion stood at rest, the men laughing and talking so that the neighborhood was filled with the hum of their cheerful, careless voices. They looked very staunch in their businesslike khaki. If only there were more of them! For, after all, this one regiment of American infantry was lost among the hordes of Oriental warriors that filled Siberia.

Suddenly above the sound of the men's laughing and chaffing he heard a queer, high pitched, continued note. Gazing curiously up the street, he saw a group of men from the British cruiser in the harbor marching into the main way from a side road.

At their head was a lone sailor, a huge, beef fed Britisher, tootling away merrily on a miniature set of bagpipes. The contrast between the bulk and seriousness of the man and the wierd tootling he emitted was startling to eyes unaccustomed to the sight. Already the nearest Americans were beginning to chuckle. Knowing the American doughboys' propensity for loud and irreverent mirth, Major Davies turned sharply.

"Batta-a-a-l-ion! Atten-n-n-shun!" he sang through his cupped hands.

There was an instant rattle and clatter as the men sprang to their places and into immobility, followed by a silence that was broken only by the droning, high pitched notes of the British bagpipes. There was the stolid rise and fall of the boots of the British sailors who marched to its tune.

Russia was in chaos, and in Siberia the brains of the American, British and Japanese detachments were playing a subtle game of strategy . . .

Davies studied these men with interest. They were ruddy, well built men, carrying themselves with quiet assurance, as if sensible of the power of the fleet to which they belonged. They possessed, in common with American sailors, that clean, freshly scrubbed look that distinguishes the seafaring Anglo-Saxon. They had another thing in common with American sailors—the lines of black braid on their collars. Davies wondered idly how many gobs realized that they were still wearing mourning for Lord Nelson.

BUT THIS naval detachment was only a handful. The worst of it was that the British military detachment was very little larger—a few companies of infantry. The combined British and American forces made a very tiny islet in that sea of armed Asiatics. What was it the British officer had quoted last night, something of Kipling about "the legions of the lost ones?" There was certainly something grimly appropriate about the description as applying to this handful of white men in far off Siberia.

But the British naval contingent was safely out of earshot by now, and Davies gave the command to rest. Sure enough, a rising ripple of laughter swept the battalion. The respect due to an ally, the really splendid fitness of these British tars and the majesty of the British navy meant nothing to the doughboy. The tootling of that diminutive bagpipe struck his sense of the ludicrous and he would have his laugh out.

Somewhere up ahead a bugle sounded. Davies called his battalion to attention. It was time to move out. He gave them "Squads right! March!" and then waited impatiently for the movement to be executed. As a cavalry officer he could not get accustomed to the comparative slowness of the movements of the foot soldiers.

In the cavalry the command of "Fours right!" is completed almost before the

echo of the officer's voice has died down, the flank of each set of fours moving swiftly around at a trot; in the infantry the inner flank slows up and the men wheel around at a walk, which makes the movement unbearably slow to a cavalryman. And Davies missed also that sharp staccato rattle of hoofs as the horses moved out, contrasting it rather wistfully with the slow steady *clump-clump* of the marching shoes of the infantry.

Ahead of him swung the other two battalions of the regiment, long lines of khaki clad soldiers keeping time to the blare of the band up forward. Along the sidewalks were silent crowds of Russians, interspersed with occasional Chinese or Koreans, all gazing stolidly at these men from overseas.

Davies kept a sharp lookout ahead and to the sides, studying the balconies of the houses with particular interest; for the evening before he had been warned that the Bolsheviki, of whom a few were still hidden in Vladivostok, might lob a bomb or two into the marching troops, this being in line with the queer sense of humor of that gentry. Now to the professional soldier parades are but a vast bore at the best, but this parade, due to the strain of watching for Bolsheviki bombs, was particularly nerve wracking.

Who wants to be marching in parades, anyway, when a war is on? The Bolsheviki were only a few miles out of Vladivostok; they occupied most of Siberia. Fighting was going on then, the Czechs and the Japanese bearing the brunt of it. Davies wondered how long before the Americans could get into it. As he marched along he could see traces of the street fighting that had taken place in Vladivostock just a short time previously—bullet pocked walls and shell torn roofs.

THE LINE of march led them up into Svetlanskaya, the main street of this far flung Russian city perched on the eastern edge of vast Asia. Here the crowds grew more dense. Davies redoubled his vigilance, watching every motion in the crowd out of the corners of his eyes. He was riding Peggy, a polo mare he had brought from the Philippines. Suddenly he drove his heel into her side so that she leaped and cleared several yards. Davies had seen some small dark object describing a graceful curve over the heads of the crowd and slowly falling in his direction. Instantly he had reasoned that it was the long delayed bomb and he gritted his teeth, waiting for the inevitable explosion.

Then he grinned sheepishly to himself as a small bouquet of flowers fell at Peggy's feet. Turning, he saw a Russian girl smiling at him from amid a group of onlookers on the sidewalks. For an instant he received an impression of great soft eyes, of an exceedingly beautiful face framed in dark hair, and a pair of most seductive lips, before Peggy's progress had carried him past and beyond the point.

There was little time to dwell on the vision so charmingly presented, for the reviewing stand was nigh. Assembled here were all the Allied commanders in Vladivostok, both naval and military. The platform was ablaze with uniforms and decorations, Japanese, French, British, Czecho-Slovak, Chinese, Italian, American and Belgian, not to forget representatives of the Russian provisional government in Siberia.

As Davies moved past, his battalion at "eyes right", his own hand at salute, he caught a momentary glimpse of the white and gold of naval uniforms, the blue beret of a French Annamite officer, the dark green of the kilt of a Scotch officer, the scarlet cap of some British "brass hat", and over all the mustard colored, ill fitting uniforms of the Japanese.

The trim completeness of his own battalion, swinging along in their businesslike olive drab and bronze, filled Davies somewhat with pride, to the extent that he forgot momentarily his own problems and the subject that engrossed his mind.

For Winfield, the intelligence officer, had talked somberly to him the night before—and it was unusual to see Winfield somber. The plain truth of the mat-

ter was that the foothold of the handful of Americans in this distant land was insecure and precarious. A sullen menace was in the air.

On the Western front the great German strength was undiminished. America was busy arming, but there were few American soldiers in France. Waiting and watching in the Orient keen and powerful forces were biding their time, waiting to throw their strength with the winning side in this great battle of the white races.

In the Orient, white men, who knew, waited, haggard and worried for news from France. A great reverse for the Allies meant almost inevitably a shakeup in the Orient, a new alignment of forces in Siberia, perhaps indeed the driving of the white race from Asia. Outnumbered ten to one by the Asiatic forces, the small Allied contingent in Siberia waited breathlessly for news from the Western front.

OF COURSE, there were the Russians. The side that could count on them stood to hold its own. But could any one count on the Russians? There were many thousands of them in Siberia. Davies remembered the Russian battalion in the parade. They had marched to the music of their own voices, singing some ancient marching song of the old Imperial Russian army. This battalion was one of the few left of that former immense army now wrecked in the great debacle on the far side of the Urals and Lake Baikal.

Gray, compact masses of powerful, slow moving, slow marching men, they moved stolidly, with the steady tread of their rude boots on the cobbled streets keeping time to the chant of the wailing notes of a half barbaric melody which might easily have been sung by ancient savage warriors on the edges of the Oxus and the Indus.

It was chanted with a peculiarly sustained rhythmic drone, its steady beat relieved ever and anon by a wildly exultant, savage note, mounting swiftly delirious only to sink again into the deeper tone, as the wind rises screaming above the steady roar of the midnight storm and then lulls again into moaning acquiescence.

The other Allies were represented in the parade as well; comparatively small groups of men, colorful and interesting, but far from powerful. There were Czecho-Slovaks in dark blue, khaki clad British soldiers, brisk little French Annamites in careless Tam O'Shanter caps; Italians, their officers statuesque in toga-like capes and helmetlike caps; Chinese, stoical and phlegmatic, each man carrying a fan in the back of his neck and using it as the spirit moved him.

And then came the Japanese, a veritable river of them, battalion after battalion, regiment after regiment, brigade after brigade until the eye grew weary watching the ceaseless flow of the mustard colored uniforms. Following the infantry came the artillery, a ceaseless rumble and clank as battery followed battery, the sullen guns hooded and somber, each tended by its little group of men like priests around some ancient idol.

The cavalry caught Davies' eye. He was surprised to observe that the largest men in the Japanese army were picked for this branch, in spite of the fact that the horses were small and scrubby. He was surprised at the number of stallions; fully half of the cavalry horses were squealing, kicking, biting, little native pony stallions. The Japanese were not very impressive looking cavalrymen, he remarked to himself; they were too short in the leg really to have good seats, and they seemed to be perched precariously on their somewhat heavy and clumsy saddles.

But the whole Japanese concession in this international exhibition of prowess was nothing to take lightly. Their forces represented the only complete and balanced military unit in Siberia, with full quota of infantry, guns, cavalry and auxiliary troops.

He thought somewhat ruefully of the American force, one regiment of infantry at peace strength, possessing two one pounder guns and some four or five ma-

chine guns in all. The contrast was not very comforting. The British were about as badly off, having naught but two slim battalions made up principally of men who had been invalided from the Western front.

HIS EYE lighted up and his heart was gladdened at a sudden rattle of hoofs that heralded the approach of the Cossacks, trotting swiftly out of a side street. There were several *sotnias* of them, carrying steel tipped lances flaunting gay pennons of black and red. Each clump of lances was led by a picturesque officer, a great fellow, colorful in blue and gold uniform, beautifully booted and spurred, with curving jewelhandled sabers and daggers, clinking musically with silver chains.

The regiment was ordered to the railroad yards after the parade. These yards were the terminal of the Trans-Siberian Railroad. They soon settled into the commodious barracks and made themselves comfortable. There were barracks to spare in Siberia. It struck Davies that Russia must have been preparing an enormous smash against some one when the world war interrupted. In Vladivostok alone there were barracks for nearly a million men and, as he found out later, there was housing for another million between Vladivostok and Lake Baikal, complete with enormous stores and stabling facilities, Zeppelin hangars, arsenals and hospitals.

FOR TWO or three days Davies was puzzled by the unanimity with which the soldiers disappeared from camp at a stated hour each afternoon, there being no one left but the men on guard or other duty. Later he found that the cliffs nearby overlooked the beaches where the feminine youth and beauty of Vladivostok disported itself each hot summer afternoon. Further investigation disclosed that bathing suits are completely disregarded in Russia, which fact might have had something to do with the regular disappearance of the regiment.

Davies had his quarters in a very comfortable room in one of the railroad offices. It was there that Borrows, the lieutenant colonel commanding the regiment, walked in on him. Davies rose and gave him a seat.

Borrows was one of that type of man who would have been in command in any walk of life. He possessed a short, stocky, close knit figure, a deep and pleasing voice, and a keen eye that missed no detail. A very wise old general, commanding the Philippine Department, had hand picked this regiment of infantry, relieving it of colonels, majors and captains and selecting the most capable men in the Islands to fill the vacancies.

Davies himself had been ordered from his cavalry regiment to take command of a battalion; Borrows had been ordered from the China station and given command of the regiment in spite of his being only a lieutenant colonel. So much was Borrow a natural leader that every individual soldier in the regiment felt his influence and strove mightily to win his regard.

"Well," he remarked, stretching himself with a sigh, "how are you getting along, Davies? Haven't had much time to get around and see you; been yammering around on about ten different inter-Allied commissions."

"So?" Davies looked interested. "What do you think of our noble Allies?"

Borrow shrugged his shoulders.

"Trouble is, every blamed board of Allied officers is dominated by one ally. Where the rest of us have majors and lieutenant colonels and captains as our representatives, they have major generals. And the major general, in each case being the senior officer, is chairman of the board. That wouldn't be so bad, but the major general aforesaid, in each case, suavely and politely makes it his business to see that nothing is accomplished."

Borrows looked worried.

"I don't get them," he went on. "They seem to be waiting for something to break and don't want to make a move until then. And the news from France isn't

so good today. Looks like the Germans are preparing an awful smash against Paris. If they get away with it there'll be hell popping over here."

The two officers gazed thoughtfully out of the open door where they could see soldiers busily engaged in cleaning up the débris of the railroad yards. The American Army is never satisfied in a billeting place until the Army has cleaned up the accumulated untidiness of generations.

"SPEAKING of Germans—" Borrows rose to go—"we have had about fourteen hundred prisoners of war wished on us—a mixed lot of Germans, Austrians, Turks and Bulgars. They have been in charge of the Russians, and we have taken over a share of them to feed and guard. They'll be here in the morning. I'm putting your battalion in charge of them to start with."

"That doesn't look as though we would get into the field very soon." Davies frowned. "I hope we didn't come over here just to guard German prisoners."

"I've been worrying every one, trying to get orders to take the field. The fighting is going on somewhere around Spasskoi. The Japanese cavalry got into a battle yesterday and slaughtered a lot of Bolsheviki. But for some reason the powers that be in Vladivostok won't let us take the field; keep putting me off day after day."

He stared somberly into space, then sighed.

"Well, I hope we have our chance to show what we can do. I'll keep bothering them until they let us go for the sake of their own peace of mind."

He rose to leave, then turned at the door.

"Davies," he remarked thoughtfully, "things don't look so very good over here in Asia. Looks to me as though a deliberate attempt were being made to discredit the white man. If they'll let it go at that, we could get by. But I'd give my right arm for a few supporting batteries of field guns and a few thousand more men. The old Romans used to take some awful chances in sending legions away out to the borders of the known world. I'll swear America has them beaten on taking chances. But there was one thing I have always admired about the Romans. They never did take over a camp site without making it ready so that they could turn out in the middle of the night and defend it."

Davies looked at him gravely.

"You don't think it's so bad as all that?"

Borrows shrugged his shoulders.

"*Quien sabe?* But we are responsible for a lot of lives in addition to being responsible for the prestige of our country. And because we have so few soldiers actually in France, we don't rank very high as yet. So far, the Germans are more than holding their own." With that he was gone, leaving a very thoughtful young major behind him.

CHAPTER II

PRISONERS AND ALLIES

THE NEXT morning the prisoners arrived, a hairy, unshaved, unwashed crew. Davies detailed Captain Hutchings' company to take them over. He listened as the earnest faced, bespectacled, young captain addressed his men.

"Now men," Hutchings' voice quavered, "a great responsibility rests on our shoulders. We have been entrusted with the guarding of these desperate looking prisoners of war. I want to impress on each and every one of you the necessity of unceasing vigilance."

The desperate looking prisoners aforesaid, guarded by double lines of sentries with fixed bayonets, waited stolidly while the harangue continued. From a nearby cook shack a rich whiff compounded of the perfume of roasting beef and baking beans assailed their nostrils. The stolid line quivered. The desperate prisoners looked, if anything, even more desperate. The cook shack door opened and a rare fragrance of soup, tinged with onions, and a musical sound as of the sizzle of

meat and the bubble of stewing vegetables came forth.

The prisoners stirred uneasily, as a herd of cattle stirs before the approach of a storm. The captain broke off his speech and turned to find the eyes of the bearded, ragged men glaring at him balefully. Gasping slightly at the shock of the concentrated venom of the massed glance directed on him he turned hurriedly to the group of noncommissioned officers.

"See!" His voice went up a whole octave. "They're looking us over. They're regular wolves, I tell you! You can't be too careful. See that every sentinel keeps his bayonet fixed, his rifle loaded and the safety catch down—"

Davies interrupted from where he stood a short distance away.

"Could I see you just a moment, Captain," he called quietly.

Hutchings stepped over to him, saluting.

"I like to see you taking your duties so seriously." Davies' voice was low and kindly. "But, Captain, you have been keeping your men standing at attention for the last fifteen minutes while you were talking. A man's interest begins to wander when he is held too long at attention. Sorry to have interrupted you, but you are so interested in your subject that you forgot that little point."

Hutchings flushed but nodded seriously.

"You are right, Major, I'll watch it in future." He nodded and returned to his noncommissioned officers.

"At ease," he commanded, and they relaxed gratefully, while the captain detailed his lieutenants as officers of the guard and selected the sergeant and corporals of the guard and divided up the reliefs and when they were to go on post. "That's all." He dismissed them to their duties.

SERGEANT DENNY clumped back to the head of the waiting column of prisoners flanked by the guards who nervously fingered their bayoneted rifles. Denny looked speculatively at the tattered unfortunates.

"You're a hard lookin' bunch of babies," he addressed them. "Prisoners of war, huh? You look like a bunch of accidents goin' somewheres to happen—not a face among you anybody but a mother could love."

The prisoners gazed at him unemotionally, stolidly, dull and resigned. Sergeant Denny spat disgustedly, waiting for the doors of the big railroad shed to be opened.

"Yep," he went on, "you're the sourest lookin' gang of sauerkrauts I ever seen. The delicate Essen business sure must 'a' been crippled when you went to war."

The prisoners swayed, their eyes grew round, another quiver went through them. Questioning looks came on every face. What were those blessed words they had heard? Saeurkraut? Essen? Ingratiating and hopeful smiles met Sergeant Denny's gaze. Suddenly the warmth that comes with appreciation swept over the sergeant. His few extemporaneous remarks had been well and kindly received. Immediately he felt that these men could not be so bad at heart; something like a tinge of sympathy for them came over him.

The nearest prisoner, a tall, thin German with a prominent Adam's apple, nervously cleared his throat.

"Permission to speak, Officer?" he asked respectfully.

"Oh, you savvy English?" Denny looked surprised. "Sure, shoot, only I ain't no officer. What's on your mind?"

"A question, please." The man's Adam's apple moved rapidly and nervously; the rest of the prisoners within earshot leaned forward anxiously; the tall and skinny German braced himself. "A question please, if it is permitted to ask. When do we eat?"

Denny looked at him in astonishment.

"Well, I'll be eternally hamstrung! 'When do we eat?' he asks! Boy, I can see you're a real sure enough soldier. I wouldn't 'a' believed it if I hadn't heard it with my own ears. Bob!" He turned to a corporal standing near by. "What do you think this guy up and asks me? Just

as sure as I'm standin' here he up and says, 'When do we eat?' I'll say the lad's a soldier tried and true!"

The corporal gazed judiciously at them, then spat very gravely.

"You said it," he remarked after due thought.

"Why, old-timer—" the sergeant's voice was kindly. These men were no longer alien enemies; they were human beings like himself. "We don't aim to starve you none. You hang on awhile and you'll get a bellyful."

The tall German nervously flicked his Adam's apple up and down and strove for speech. He cleared his throat once or twice.

"Dank you," he finally got out. "It is that we haf not eaten for two days and before that only black bread for many weeks."

"The hell you say!"

The sergeant's face expressed real concern; he galvanized immediately into action. After holding a low voiced conversation with the other noncoms, he stepped up to where Captain Hutchings was examining the lists of prisoners and saluted.

"Captain, these here Heinies ain't et nothin' for days. It'll be several hours before they gets their rations and gets them ready. Now the men in this company is willin' to share up their dinner with them and we can scare up some chow all cooked and ready from the other companies."

"What's that? What's that? Why—why, Sergeant, I don't know, the regulations—nobody has ordered—"

"Them birds is starvin' on their feet, Captain," Denny broke in respectfully. "The rations can be replaced from their stuff when it is issued; it don't seem right, somehow, to keep, 'em waitin'!" Then Sergeant Denny staring, straight to the front, added, "Besides the regulations forbids starvin' prisoners o' war or abusin' 'em."

"Quite right, quite right!" The young captain drew a sigh of relief. "It's against the regulations to starve prisoners of war. See that they are fed immediately."

Great, steaming, galvanized iron cans of beans and beef soup and coffee were brought to the prisoners. They fell to like wolves. Afterward it was discovered that they had had nothing to smoke for years. The soldiers, learning this, gave them smoking materials, and a beatific contentment reigned over the fourteen hundred men.

THAT night great vigilance was exercised. Many and frequent were the inspections, and the double sentry guards were examined at all hours. The next morning there was a roll call of the prisoners. There seemed to be some error. Another check was made. Unaccountably the total of prisoners had increased from fourteen hundred to some fourteen hundred and thirty men. The following night the total had jumped to fourteen hundred and sixty.

It took the Americans two or three days to learn that the guards must face outward instead of inward, to prevent all the remaining German prisoners in Siberia from sneaking in and surreptitiously throwing themselves on the commissary and kind heartedness of the Americans.

One evening Davies foregathered with Winfield, the intelligence officer, to have dinner at the Zoladar Rog Café—a name almost instantly translated into the "Solitary Dog" by the doughboys. The place was filled with Allied and Russian officers and brilliant with the gold and green and crimson of the uniforms of the latter. The loud hum of their voices rose above the throb of violins and the clatter of dishes.

From somewhere in the crowd a man's voice rose in song. The conversation ceased. It was a melodious song, a half barbaric thing, a burst of music that might be chanted by gray battalions of Russians on the march. It rose stronger and more powerful in a man's rich baritone. It grew in volume until it seemed to dominate the room.

Then suddenly a crash of sound burst

forth as all the Russians joined in the chorus, as only Russians can crash into a chorus—a musical, shouting thunder of voices accompanied by the rattle of glasses and the stamp of feet. The song ended as abruptly as it had begun. There were a few wild cheers, and men settled back again to serious talk.

At the table near Davies and Wingfield sat a group of Russian officers. One was in the silver laced uniform of the Hussars; another was a captain in the Tcherkess Cossacks, his tunic a bright cherry red, carrying ivory and silver cartridge cases on his chest. There were two officers of the Don Cossacks, and one tall, fair haired Circassian in a brilliant uniform and wearing a hiltless Circassian saber, ivory handled. They were tall, broad shouldered men, slim as to hips, and sleepy eyed. Most of the officers wore the blue and gold of the Cossacks of the Ussuri. It was to one of these that Davies addressed a question.

"Pardon me," he asked in English, "but could you tell me the name of that song you just sang?"

The tall young officer smiled and shook his head.

"*Je ne comprend pas anglais*," he answered. "*Est-ce que vous parlez Français?*"

Davies repeated his question in French and the Russian told him that the song was a Cossack air, about a Cossack hero named Shtenka Razin. The song told how Shtenka Razin became enamoured of a beautiful Persian princess whom he had captured, so enamoured that he neglected his warlike pursuits. His followers came to him, complaining. To show that his heart was in the right place, after all, he threw the Persian princess into the Volga and became a hero, to the Russian way of thinking.

WINFIELD grinned as he heard the story.

"Some hero, that Shtenka Razin," he commented briefly. "The joke seems to have been on the princess. I only hope we are not the Persian princess here in Siberia."

"What do you mean by that cryptic remark?" countered Davies.

"Well, we don't rank so high numerically over here. You know there's another regiment coming from the Philippines and some reinforcements from the States, but even then we don't stand so high. We are as friendless as a skunk at a garden party. I think our best bet is the Russians."

"What good are they under present conditions?"

"Well, there are several hundred thousand ex-soldiers and officers in Siberia. If they line up with one of our high and mighty Allies it won't be so good. If they lined up with the Americans it might make a certain rather high handed Oriental outfit stop, look and listen before they did anything foolish."

"Who's the head and titular representative of these Russians?"

"Chap by the name of Kalmikoff; these fellows in blue and gold, the Ussuri Cossacks, are all part of his force. He had the only respectable armed force of Russians in Siberia, maintains a sort of feudal army, cavalry, infantry and artillery, and seems to be the head of the Russian outfit organized and unorganized." Winfield gazed across the crowded room. "He's in Vladivostock tonight, palavering with our outfit and the other Allies. He'll probably blow in here later on."

They stopped talking to listen to the music of the Gipsy orchestra. The violins were playing some exultant Russian music, music so poignantly powerful that it made Davies feel as if he were lifted up and put down in far off dim places, where he could feel the earth shake to the thunderous tread of galloping squadrons, could see the steel tips of forests of lances stretching to the horizon's limit, could see the earth blackened by the passage of hordes of fighting men and the sun darkened with the flight of ravens.

The music ended. Both sat silent in revery. Davies thought of the once mighty Russia, now writhing in the agony of revolution. He thought of himself, strangely set down on the Asiatic

edge of this enormous country; of his soldiers, young Americans from Oregon and Washington and California, traveling adventurously across purple seas and past "evening isles fantastical" to this mysterious land of Russia, Russia where there was so much laughter in the sunlight and so much weeping in the shadows, to face none knew what sort of treachery and to meet none knew what fate.

THERE was a sudden hush in the café. Turning to discover the reason, Davies found that every Russian in the place was standing stiffly at attention, with eyes fixed on the big folding doors of the café entrance. Within the frame of this entrance stood the slight, well knit figure of an officer, brilliant in the blue and gold of the Ussuri Cossacks, with heavy gold shoulder knots and aiguillettes making his uniform more distinctive.

One hand was on the gorgeously jeweled hilt of a curving saber, the other was raised at salute. From his quietly commanding air and the richness of his uniform Davies judged that he must be a person of some importance.

Succeeding events confirmed this, for an awed whisper of "Ataman! Ataman!" ran round the room as the newcomer strode briskly to a table, followed at a respectful distance by two huge Cossack soldiers, their great height accentuated by the tall bearskin busbies they wore. They were armed to the teeth, with carbines, daggers, sabers and pistols.

After the personage was seated, each and every Russian officer made his way humbly to the table, stood at attention until he was noticed, then asked a question with bent head. Upon receipt of the answer, the greater part returned quietly to their own tables. To one or two luckless ones the newcomer shook his head coldly, and these departed, immediately leaving the café.

He must indeed be of high rank, thought Davies, to make it obligatory upon all Russian officers to beg permission to remain in the same café with him.

"That's your man Kalmikoff," spoke up Winfield, "Ataman, or chief of the Cossacks of the Ussuri. Boy, he's your meat."

Davies looked up in surprise.

"Just what do those words signify?" he asked.

Winfield drummed thoughtfully on the table for a space.

"It means this—that you are to act as intelligence officer while you are in the field—"

"I don't lose my battalion?" Davies looked up in alarm.

"No, in addition to your other duties—"

"But we are going to take the field?" broke in Davies eagerly.

"Yes, keep it under your hat, but you'll be moving out any day now."

"Any chance of a scrap with the Bolsheviki?"

"Probably," Winfield shrugged his shoulders. "They aren't very far out. Their rear guard is somewhere near Spasskoi and their main body along the railroad towards the Amur River. The Bolsheviki are putting up a hard fight. They are said to be led by trained officers from the German and Austrian armies. But to return to this intelligence business, you've got to keep in touch with me. Come in to my office tomorrow and I'll give you all the dope I have."

UPON his return to his quarters that night Davies heard men running and shouting down the dark street. As the figures passed under the dim light of a lamp he saw that they were American soldiers.

"What's the excitement?" he called to one.

"Oh, some Limeys down here havin' a fight with some Japs," the man flung over his shoulder.

Following the sound of the footsteps, Davies saw a confused mass of struggling figures. Coming closer he made out the forms of several British soldiers and sailors fighting desperately with a Japanese patrol. The Americans joyfully pitched in, coming to the aid of the British. The fight was soon over, and the Japanese,

outnumbered, withdrew in good order.

"You bozos don't want to start them kind o' fights unless you got some one around to back you up," one of the Americans admonished, it must be admitted somewhat arrogantly.

"I fawncy we can fight our own fights, without any ruddy Yanks butting in," a British sailor retorted crisply.

The Britishers drew together; the Americans cheerfully prepared to take up the challenge. Everything was set for a nice friendly little battle when Davies broke it up and sent the quarreling allies on their respective ways. British and American soldiers and sailors were always fighting and hurling insults at one another. The trouble was due to the fact that they treated each other with all the arrogant intolerance of members of the same family, and not at all with the courtesy that one reserves for strangers. Also, speaking the same language, they could too easily understand one another's insults.

"CAN YOU tell me one thing?" Davies asked Winfield next day as they sat together in the latter's office in headquarters on Svetlanskaya Street. "What in the name of all that's holy are we here in Siberia for, anyway?"

"Ask me something easy!" Winfield shook his head. "I think the original idea was that we were to fight our way through Siberia and attack the Germans on the Eastern front. But that idea is a little vague now. Our job now seems to have resolved itself into aiding in driving the Bolsheviki from Siberia. You'll be sent into the field *toute de suite*, to cooperate with the Japanese, the English and the rest of the Allies. In addition to that, as soon as you catch up with Kalmikoff's outfit of Cossacks, you are to act as liaison and intelligence officer in the field.

"Keep a sharp eye on all the Allies. Your main job is to wheedle, cajole and otherwise win the Russians over to a proper appreciation of the delights of full co-operation with the Americans. The least you must do is to make them sympathetically neutral in case things go wrong. What you've got to try and accomplish is to win them over as our allies in case we should be jumped by superior forces now acting in conjunction with us. Keep in touch with me. Return with your shield or upon it. Selah!"

"I don't see—" Davies paced the room heatedly—"how winning over the Russians is going to prevent us from being run into the sea if any one wants to do it. Heaven knows we were sent over here like lambs to the slaughter; no men, no horses, no guns, no anything," he concluded bitterly.

Winfield shrugged his shoulders.

"It's our only chance, if our noble but somewhat untrustworthy Allies decide that the Allied goose is cooked in France, we are due for a lot of unpleasantness. If we can get the Russians lined up with us it may make said untrustworthy Allies think twice. The Russians are pretty strong."

"Where do you get all this dope, anyway?"

"Well, I have to be a sort of a gumshoe artist. I know the correct dope, all right, don't worry about that. And believe me, old-timer, you had better tuck in and do your best for there is likely to be a row that will make Custer's last stand look like a quiet game of tiddlelywinks." Winfield, the gay and debonair Winfield, looked extremely serious.

Davies whistled in amazement.

"So it is as bad as all that?"

"Worse!" grunted Winfield.

Turning from the window, through which he had been gazing speculatively across the way to where a white and blood red banner dominated Svetlanskaya, a banner that rippled sinuously in the breeze, curving and flowing as a cobra might weave and twist its shiny coils before striking, Davies nodded.

"All right, Win, old-timer, I'll do my best," he said, soberly.

"Well, here's some more news. Good old General Bevans, who made up this expedition, has been relieved of command of the Philippine Department and some

busted major general has been sent out to take over. This old bird has picked up every officer that Bevans threw out and is sending them on here with the Umphty-first Infantry which arrives tomorrow. So look for a choice collection of barroom bums to descend on Vladivostok tomorrow night."

AND IT was so. The newcomers were conspicuous, officers and men, by their sloppiness. A soldier from Colonel Borrows' regiment looked like a man from a different army. The new arrivals bade fair to undo all the good impression made by the first American outfit, which had been commended time and again for the exemplary actions and appearance of its personnel.

But there was little time to sorrow over this. Davies was writing some letters when he heard a roar go out from the direction of the men's billets. The roar was followed by shouts and yells which were succeeded by prolonged bursts of cheering.

Hurrying out, an excited soldier, too overcome to remember even to salute or to say "sir" shouted gleefully—

"We're goin' after the Bolshies!"

He sped on his way, spreading the glad tidings. "Hooray! We're goin' after the Bolshies!"

The place hummed like a hornet's nest. Discipline seemed suddenly to have vanished; officers and men were rejoicing together and slapping one another on the back. A foreigner coming suddenly on the scene would have thought the American forces nothing but a mob.

The first burst of enthusiasm settled into a quick preparation for marching. All that night preparations went on. Men looked to rifles and bayonets and packs and shoes. The company officers inspected their commands. The field officers studied maps and planned the routes to be followed.

The next morning they entrained, and the great echelons, made up of freight cars, moved out, filled with cheering, singing soldiers.

CHAPTER III

THE RUSSIAN ECLIPSE

THE SECOND day out Davies' echelon was sidetracked to allow a trainload of Czecho-Slovaks returning from the front to pass by on their way to Vladivostok to rest and refit. The train carrying the returning soldiers slowed up and stopped opposite Davies' forces. Czecho-Slovaks and Americans swarmed out to greet one another.

Davies studied these men with interest. He had heard the story of their desertion *en masse* from the Austrian armies to join their Slav kindred, the Russians. The Bolsheviki revolt threw the Czecho-Slovaks on their own, and they had fought their way steadily through from the Eastern front here to faraway Siberia, a march resembling the story in Xenophon's "Anabasis" of the immortal Ten Thousand.

Davies stepped to the ground, and an orderly brought him some letters sent up from the base. Reading these with interest, he noticed one of the Czecho-Slovak officers eyeing him wistfully.

"I have not received a letter from my family for four years," said the officer simply. "I do not know whether they live or die."

Hastily putting the letter away unfinished, the American offered the Czecho-Slovak a cigaret. The man took it with an air of one receiving a priceless benefit. The look on his face as he drew in the first inhalation was one of ecstasy.

"The last cigaret I had was two years ago," he explained.

"Is that true of all of your men?" asked Davies.

He nodded. Davies excused himself and went back to the car.

"Tell the men," he instructed the sergeant major, "that these soldiers haven't had a smoke for two years."

Returning, he brought his own reserve supply of tobacco and gave it to the officer. All down the line he saw like exchanges taking place, the American soldier, ever generous, handing over his

tobacco gladly to these smoke starved men. The Czecho-Slovaks tried hard to make the Americans take every thing of value they possessed in return, but were consistently and courteously refused.

The two trains whistled. Men ran and climbed aboard. As the train carrying the blue clad Czechs pulled away the air was split with deafening cheers and the Americans could hear the sound of the enthusiasm long after the new found friends had disappeared from view.

"The more friends we have out in this neck of the woods the better," Davies said to himself.

But traveling by train was to be a short affair. Orders came through from the Japanese, who had charge of the railroads, that the Americans were to proceed by marching.

Colonel Borrows was angry.

"I believe there is a plot to keep us out of the fighting," he growled, then cheering up, continued, "but it will be a fine opportunity to get the men hardened up."

This was no matter of rejoicing to the men who, like all foot soldiers, hated to march heavily laden with their packs. The American doughboy can not be said to be an enthusiastic exponent of the hardening up process. Especially was he vengeful in his growling when long troop trains, laden with Japanese soldiers traveling in comfort, went by him day after day.

BUT THEY were slowly nearing the zone of fighting. As they marched they could see many traces of it—shell torn ground, hasty entrenchments, pieces equipment and newly made graves. Trains of wounded came by regularly, returning to the base.

Davies was chagrined at the delay, as he was anxious to catch up with the Russian forces, still far out on the front ahead of them.

He derived some satisfaction from overseeing the horses and mules of the regiment, a job wisely wished on him by Colonel Borrows, who had sense enough to take advantage of Davies' experience as a cavalryman. He found grave difficulty in convincing the mounted men of the regiment that a horse was entitled to a rest at the hourly halts as well as the man riding him. After finding the men of the machine gun company lolling negligently in their saddles at the first halt, he fairly lifted them off the horses' backs with a forceful stream of bitter invective, and they sinned no more.

But it was hard for a cavalry officer to hike with infantry. In the cavalry there is much variety in the gaits. When men and horses are a little galled with the walking pace, they can be exhilarated with the trot. When this grows tiresome, they can be slowed down to a walk again, which seems a rest in itself. Then when both the walking and the trotting grow irksome, men can be dismounted to lead their animals and thereby work another set of muscles. The hardest thing in the infantry is the tiresome deadly slowness of it.

To cap the climax a regiment of Japanese cavalry passed by them at a spanking trot one day. Davies inwardly cursed as the inferior horses went smoothly by and the cavalry disappeared ahead of them in a cloud of dust.

It was a glorious cavalry country through which they were marching. Not a fence or a piece of wire anywhere. The land was gently rolling, partially wooded and full of excellent forage and water. Great stacks of hay were in the fields, and the barns were full of grain. In addition, it was a wonderful country in which to handle cavalry tactically, there being plenty of cover for led horses, the rolling ground lending itself to easy concealment of vast bodies of cavalry.

Part of the time they marched along the railroad. Trains full of Japanese infantry went by hour after hour. It was a little galling to be plugging along through the dust and to see soldiers of another army go riding by in trains, but Davies realized that the regiment was getting splendidly hardened with the daily march and getting itself into excellent condition

to render an account of itself, should the need arise.

More and more, traces of the battles fought over this ground in the previous weeks began to show themselves. The road was filled with boots and cast off clothing left behind by the fleeing Bolsheviki.

At a halt one of the men walked away from the road. Suddenly he came running back, white faced.

"There's a dead man behind that bush!" he shouted.

And sure enough, the badly decomposed body of a Bolshevik lay huddled and sprawled behind the growth of greenery.

Thereafter for days the air was filled with the effluvium of decaying bodies. The roads were lined with the dead. It was like marching through a charnel house, the bodies lay in all sorts of ungainly attitudes, blackening and weather stained.

DAVIES had been considerably exercised by the well known disposition of the American soldier to drink up all his canteen water the first five minutes of the march and thereafter quench his thirst at every wayside streamlet, irrespective of its origin. Time and time again he had driven men back from foul water, knowing full well that the most virulent of camp diseases are water borne. One day he saw three men who had slipped away from the column and were busily guzzling water from a roadside ditch.

"You men come with me," he ordered.

Obedient, they followed. He led them several paces up-stream to where there was a black bulk half in and half out of water. It was the dead body of a Bolshevik, one blackened hand and arm extending out into the middle of the stream.

The men looked at the sight and gagged.

"Nice stuff you've been drinking," commented Davies, and sent them back to their company.

The first day or two out he had many men with sore feet. Now a large percentage of stragglers is not a good sign. It seemed to him that the percentage was altogether too large. He noticed that the ambulance followed along in the rear of the battalion. It was too easy for a man to drift out of column when his pack became irksome, and then sit on the side of the road simply waiting for the ambulance to come along to give him a nice ride the rest of the way.

Davies placed the ambulance at the head of the battalion. He personally investigated every man who complained of being footsore. At the end of four days' hiking, Borrows slapped him on the back one evening after camp was made.

"How comes," he asked, "that your battalion has the lowest percentage of stragglers in the regiment?"

"Is that the case, Colonel?"

"Absolutely. Your figures read something like two per cent., as against ten per cent. for the next battalion. Snappy work. I don't know how you do it, but keep it up. I'm going to tell these infantry majors that a cavalry man is outmarching them."

Davies grinned to himself and told his men that they were the best hikers in the regiment. Thereafter the percentage dropped even more, so that it came to be a disgrace to be seen anywhere near the ambulance.

The air was full of rumors as they neared the zone of fighting. Some said that an English battalion had been massacred by the Bolsheviki. Others said that the Japanese cavalry were shooting down every Russian they found with arms in his hands. Occasionally one could hear the distant rumble of guns. A wounded Italian officer came through one day and stopped for a few minutes. He told Davies a surprising story of a quarrel between the Italians and the Japanese, ending in a pitched battle in which many were killed on both sides. He was raving against the Japanese in his fiery Italian way, stating that they were the most arrogant and haughty of soldiers and that there would be grave trouble with them if they did not mend their ways.

THE ROADS began to be filled with Japanese marching to the front. The Americans marched doggedly along, hoping each day that they would catch up with the fighting and be able to give an account of themselves. Squadron after squadron of Japanese cavalry, and battery after battery of artillery trotted past the plodding American infantry. Davies longed most poignantly for his squadron of negroes.

As yet he had seen no trace of the Russian forces, except an occasional wandering Cossack patrol flashing by with pennoned lances. He heard that the Cossack leader was near the Ussuri River, which was comparatively close. Davies took fresh heart from this, being anxious to carry out his instructions.

During a halt Davies noticed one thing that set him to thinking. As the Japanese rested, several of them wandered away from their column and found the bodies of some Bolsheviki piled up behind a log. The yellow men fixed bayonets and stabbed the dead bodies of the white Bolsheviki again and again, laughing uproariously the while. It seemed a strange joke to the watching Americans.

But there were many admirable things about the Japanese army. The great advantage possessed by the Orientals was an almost entire absence of any heavy trains for carrying their food. Using rice, tea and a species of dried fish which swelled up to many times its bulk when soaked in water, their rations were very portable. They had no kitchen impedimenta as had the Americans. As the squads of men broke ranks they dug a small trench, filled their individual mess kits with water and boiled their tea and rice without any fuss.

Davies wondered how much of the vaunted Japanese freedom from military diseases was due to general sanitary measures and how much was due simply to the fact that the Japanese soldier boiled all his water, preferring to drink it in the form of tea, even carrying cold tea in his canteen on the march. For in camp the Americans found the Japanese exceedingly slipshod. They had one pleasant little habit of slaughtering animals and leaving the entrails and refuse scattered over the ground. Their camp sanitation left a lot to be desired when compared with the strict practises of the Americans.

Once a Japanese general led his officers over to the American camp, which was laid out accurately and exactly, each company street and line of tents as straight as a ruler so that the whole effect was exceedingly neat and businesslike. The Japanese general pointed out the American plan to his subordinates and demanded an equal performance of them.

Davies was interested in observing the manner in which the Japanese cavalry tethered out their large proportion of stallions. They had a system of tying them separately, a rope to each foot, a method that was very unique and that resulted in an enormous number of burned fetlocks. He noticed too that they had an unusually large proportion of sore backed horses.

More and more, Japanese seemed to be filling the country side around them. Finally at Spasskoi they went into camp with an entire Japanese brigade encamped on their right. On the hills back of the camp Davies noticed a battalion of Japanese field artillery. In examining the other approach to the camp, Davies found it well covered by a detachment of Japanese machine guns.

RATHER perturbed, he strolled toward Colonel Borrows' tent. He found the regimental commander scanning a telegram.

"Things don't seem so rosy in France," Borrows informed him, low voiced. "It looks as though the Germans were getting ready for another big push." He rubbed his iron gray hair, a worried frown on his forehead.

"We seem to be pretty well surrounded here," Davies remarked casually.

"Yes, so I observed. There is an English outfit the other side of camp. They're coming over to call on us. Stick around and help me entertain them."

The British colonel soon hove in to view, accompanied by his staff. This colonel was a typical Britisher, a bluff and hearty individual, wearing his uniform well.

The visiting officers were welcomed, cigars were offered and talk was had of this and that. Sufficient time having elapsed, the time came to bring the official call to a conclusion.

The old, white haired, red faced British colonel rose. His officers filed out of the tent before him, leaving him standing alone facing the American officers.

"I say," the Britisher remarked, as if having forgotten something, "I say, things are not so very cheerful on the Western front, eh what?"

"No," replied Borrows, "the news seems none too good."

"And have you noticed the peculiar way we seem to be hemmed in by some of our allies?" the Britisher went on.

Colonel Borrows nodded, waiting.

"Looks a bit odd, eh what?"

Again Borrows nodded. There was a silence for a space. The Britisher cleared his throat.

"I suppose," he said lightly, "that should anything happen—er—er, anything uncomfortable or nasty—that the old adage still holds?"

Borrows looked faintly puzzled.

"Which old adage, Colonel?" he asked politely.

"Why, er-er, the old saying, you know." The red faced colonel grew even redder and seemed half embarrassed. "The old saying, you know, that blood is thicker than water?"

There was an electric silence in the tent. The import of those few simple words flashed suddenly over Davies. He felt a thrill run through him, the thrill at the drama of this thing—the two great white nations represented by these two regimental commanders here in far off Siberia, drawing together in the face of a common danger.

The American colonel nodded his head gravely.

"The old adage always holds, Colonel; blood is thicker than water."

That evening, without a further word being said, the British battalion moved up to a vacant space beside the American regiment. The Anglo-Saxons rested in the middle of vast hordes of Orientals, who may or may not have wished them evil, but whose very inscrutability was cause for alarm.

DAVIES later learned to like the Japanese people extremely well, finding them a courteous, kindly people of charming manners and pleasing ways. But it must be admitted that the Japanese army was thoroughly imbued with Prussian ideas. They had modeled not only the outward form of their army on the Prussian plan, even to copying the uniforms, but had made the inner spirit conform as well. And as Americans in the Orient well knew, Japanese politics at that time were dominated by a jingoistic war party that believed in blood and thunder and lots of it. It was no wonder that things were ticklish.

Happily the night passed without incident. The next day an invitation came from the Japanese high command for the American field officers to appear at a banquet tendered in honor of the Allies.

Davies accompanied Colonel Barrows to one of the finest spreads he had ever attended. The Japanese commander was the soul of hospitality. The Japanese officers aiding him accompanied every polite remark with a remarkable degree of bowing and hissing, the Japanese symbol of politeness.

At the table were seated British, French, Russian and Belgian officers. Wines and liquors were plentiful and tasteful. The inevitable polite toasts and speeches were made. Borrows made an excellent speech, very grateful and tactful. There were many "Banzais!" shouted by the Japanese.

One incident was remarkable. A tall Cossack officer, glittering in blue and gold, felt suddenly impelled to make a speech. Rising with some difficulty he commanded silence.

In the sonorous voice that a Russian

reserves for speeches the Cossack officer held forth in his own tongue. At what seemed to be the peroration of his speech, he suddenly stopped for a second. Every eye was upon him. He began to slide easily and smoothly under the table. His speech went on with undiminished vigor, as first his waist disappeared, then his chest, then his shoulders and finally his head. From under the table came the roar of his voice quite undisturbed by his complete eclipse. Every one else was silent. The polite Japanese smiled uneasily. The white men laughed. Davies felt a little disturbed. The eclipse of the Russian seemed to be too brutally like the situation of the Russian nation at that time.

CHAPTER IV

ONWARD—ONWARD!

THE MARCH was resumed and the regiment came into a Russian village the day following. A single street was lined with log huts daubed with clay. The only impressive building was the church, a fairly large building painted a light blue and crowned with a golden dome. The village was absolutely deserted.

The peasants had taken to the woods at the approach of the Americans. To the Russian peasant, armed men invariably spell oppression. For an hour or two after camp was made there was no sign of the natives. Then the usual small boy was caught near the edge of camp. His squalls of terror were stilled with a large and generous piece of chocolate. He disappeared to return with a cohort of youngsters, who were initiated into the mysteries of American chewing gum. Reassured, the older peasants began to appear by ones and twos. Finally the whole village returned, happy to find that they were not to be burned and slain.

Their joy at the placid dispositions of these strangely speaking soldiers was boundless. An old man came up to where Davies sat outside his tent. In his arms the old peasant carried a great jar of buttermilk. Now if there was anything that Davies detested above all things it was buttermilk. Politely he tried to refuse the gift. The old man talked in voluble Russian, trying to explain to him that it was a free will offering, a gift.

As Davies shook his head kindly, the old man, thinking that surely the stranger must be deaf, raised his voice more and more. Behind him was the wife. She listened, grumbling audibly at the old fellow's attempts to make himself heard. Finally she could stand it no longer. Up she came and spoke confidentially and assuredly to her better half.

Davies could almost understand her saying.

"Here, you don't know how to make a foreigner understand; let me do it!"

The old peasant resigned the jar of buttermilk and watched his wife hopefully. She filled her lungs with air and then emitted an ear splitting shout that sounded like a steam siren let loose in the fog. Davies took the buttermilk at last, to save the good woman's vocal chords, and tried not to show his distaste as he put it to his lips.

Joyously the two disappeared to return with great loaves of black bread, the *tchorni kleb* of Russia, which they pressed on him. He nibbled at this, and again they left to return this time with jars of wonderful strawberry preserves. The strawberries were of enormous size and had retained their shape and color; they were a welcome addition to the fare. There is some lack in the American military ration that makes a man desire sweets mightily. The good peasants absolutely refused to take any money, looked hurt, in fact, when he offered them a handful of paper rubles.

When the regiment marched away next morning the whole population of the village turned out and bade them a tearful farewell. There were of course the usual four or five soldiers kissing the usual four or five girls goodby much to the envy of their less enterprising comrades. It was always a matter of wonder to Davies,

how the American soldier, not speaking a word of the language, could always succeed so quickly in establishing himself in the affections of the feminine element of any place he passed through.

The next camping place was near a great monastery that sprawled along over the tops of the hills, its walls enclosing orchards and gardens and parks. The abbot appeared and invited the officers to dinner. The urbane and polished old man was a perfect host. He furnished the table with wines made by the monks, an excellent vintage with a spicy sort of taste very unique and pleasing.

TO DAVIES, after a few days' march through Siberia, it seemed that some one should correct the ordinary impression of this great land, an impression mostly based on moving picture views of prisoners walking in chains through the snow. It was in the latter part of the summer and the countryside was like that of any middle western State. It might have been Nebraska or Wisconsin, as far as climate and scenery went.

He found that Siberia's southern portion was settled for the most part by the exiled *intelligentzia*, who were sent to Siberia quite as much to settle the lands there as to punish them for free thinking. Criminals were ordinarily sent farther north to the vicinity of Kamchatka to work in the mines, although some of them were kept in the southern part as well.

It was a country of infinite riches. Great forests covered parts of it; the streams were broad and deep and stocked with fish; there was a plenitude of minerals from coal to gold, including oil and copper. Taken all in all, it was as rich as America in natural resources.

Wonderful fruits were grown there. And this fruit was the cause of a salutary lesson to the men of Davies' battalion. It is very hard for a thirsty, dusty soldier to resist filching an apple or two, or a luscious pear, or a handful of plums. But multiply this soldier by a thousand and the countryside would look as if a flood of devouring locusts had swept it bare.

At one of the camps an old woman came crying into camp and was brought to Davies' tent. She was sobbing heartbrokenly. Investigation disclosed that soldiers had broken into her garden, stolen all her vegetables and stripped her fruit trees bare. To the soldiers it was a harmless prank. To the old woman it spelled starvation, as she had nothing to store against the winter's coming.

Davies lined up the battalion. He led the woman out in front of it.

"Had your mothers been alone and a gang of foreigners come through and stolen every mouthful she had to eat, you would have been pretty sore when you got back from the war. This woman's three sons are soldiers and away from home. Am I commanding a gang of thieving thugs or a battalion of decent Americans?"

He had scarcely time to return to his tent, where he intended giving the old woman enough money to repay her for her losses, when the battalion sergeant major came up, followed by several soldiers carrying their campaign hats filled with something.

"Sir," the sergeant major saluted, "the men is blamed sorry for what some of them done and won't do it again. They've took up a little collection for the lady."

He presented the contents of the four or five campaign hats. A stream of bills dropped into the old woman's lap—enough money to keep her for the rest of her life. She departed, dazed and happy. That was the last of pilfering by members of Davies' battalion.

Traces of the passage of armies showed in the countryside—here a burned and blackened farmstead, there a line of hastily abandoned trenches, or a few strands of barbed wire. Dead Bolsheviki still made the air noisome with the odor of decay. From far ahead came the sound of heavy guns.

Stopping a Cossack patrol one evening, Davies found that Kalmikoff was proceeding toward the Amur River, fighting

with the Japanese on the flanks of the retreating Bolsheviki. The Japanese objective was Khabarovsk. Here it was felt that a halt would be made, and it was here that Davies hoped to be able to overtake the Russian forces and carry out his instructions.

OCCASIONAL vestiges of Bolsheviki atrocities were found. The bodies of many women were found among the slain. Whether these were innocent villagers or members of the Bolsheviki fighting forces could not be told. Their bodies were invariably terribly mutilated and nearly hacked to pieces.

Traces of the torturing of prisoners were discovered as well. In one place near the railroad Davies discovered a man, a Czecho-Slovak officer, who was so hopelessly mutilated and had so little of the spark of life left in him that his plea to be put out of his misery seemed quite reasonable.

The American force moved forward steadily day after day, marching toward the sound of the guns.

Not a day passed without sight or sound of the Japanese. On some occasions groups of cavalry patrols encircled the marching American regiment; on other days a battalion or two of Japanese infantry would march ahead or behind, or Japanese airplanes would swoop above.

The village of Ussuri was reached at last. This town was the home of the Ussuri Cossacks, and both town and Cossacks are named after the Ussuri River. It was a straggling village, with the usual log houses. All of the able bodied men were away with Kalmikoff and the town was held by the women and the old men. They all were deeply interested in the mules of the American baggage trains. These mules were huge Missouri animals, close to seventeen hands high. Compared to the diminutive Cossack ponies they seemed unbelievably enormous.

The Cossacks were also interested and amazed at the fact that the American soldiers ate white bread, this being a luxury which only the very wealthy could afford in many parts of Europe.

The rains started with a vengeance. The Siberian roads became almost impassable overnight, for anything except men on foot, or horseback, or for mules. The mud quickly showed up the incapacity of the drivers of the escort wagons. Time and time again Davies had to ride back to the trains, where some excited mule skinner and four excited mules were blocking the advance, all pulling in different directions at different times. Davies calmed down mules and mule skinner; then the mule skinner let the animals stand quietly for a few seconds, gathered in the reins, then quickly started all four animals pulling into their collars at the same instant. The heavy wagon started rolling out of the mud.

The rain was cold, the packs heavy and the roads slippery. The pup tents were sodden, the men's blankets soaked, and their clothing wet for day after day.

ONE NIGHT Davies' tent was nearly torn loose from its moorings by the violence of the wind storm. He woke up startled, reaching for boots and overcoat, because there was a strange sound above the noise of the wind and the rain.

Before he could get out of the tent, some one entered hurriedly. A flash of lightning showed it to be Symonds, his battalion adjutant, whose clothes were streaming with rain.

"The whole blame camp has blown down, Major!" he shouted, as the two moved out into the darkness.

In spite of the situation, Davies had to smile, as here and there through the void he could hear the voices of the men raised in laughter interspersed with burst after burst of wild cheering. Suddenly a song started up from the far end of the battalion. Voice after voice took it up, until the throats of a thousand men were shouting forth the refrain. And Davies chuckled; for his men, wet and bedraggled, their bedding soaked and their tents blown down at three o'clock in the morning, were stumbling around in the Si-

berian mud cheerfully singing "Throw Out The Life Line."

Not before dawn did the camp get straightened out and the damage repaired. It was right after breakfast that a messenger came to the regimental commander's tent and handed Colonel Borrows a telegram from the base at Vladivostok. Borrows read it, then his shoulders sagged ever so slightly and he sat down, his air that of one feeling suddenly weary and spent.

It took until after breakfast time for the news to circle around the camp, where it eddied among the tents, drawing clusters of indignant and incredulous men together and stopping the work in cook shacks and picket lines for the time being. It was as if a sudden pall had been dropped over the spirits of the regiment.

DAVIES was eating his breakfast in his tent, his mess kit balanced precariously on his knee when Symonds the battalion came in somberly and leaned against the tent pole.

"Heard the bad news yet Major?"

Davies shook his head and waited.

"Well, we lose Colonel Borrows as regimental commander and draw a new C.O. today."

Davies put down his mess kit, breakfast forgotten.

"The hell you say!" he snorted.

Symonds shrugged his shoulders dejectedly.

"There's no mistake about it. The regimental sergeant major saw the telegram and gave me the dope."

"What's to become of Colonel Borrows?"

"He stays on as lieutenant colonel. The new colonel's name is Bagg, Clarence Ferdinand Beauregarde Bagg." Symonds drawled out the name in disgust.

"Know anything about him?"

"Yes, sir. I was unfortunate enough to have to serve under him for a month or two at Camp Lewis. He's the world's worst. Even the War Department had to bust him. He was a temporary brigadier general, you know. But his friends in the War Department didn't want to hurt his feelings, so they shipped him out here, to take away the command of the regiment from one of the finest soldiers that ever lived. This Army gives me a pain in the neck sometimes."

Symonds kicked bitterly at the tent pole, and added scornfully—

"Clarence Ferdinand Beauregarde Bagg!"

The trouble with Symonds was that he was too fresh from civil life, where he had unfortunately acquired a habit of assessing men by what they had above their ears rather than what they wore on their shoulders. As he put the matter very succintly, a "bonehead by the river's brim, a simple bonehead was to him," whether said bonehead wore the chevrons of a corporal or the eagles of a colonel.

Davies listened abstractedly.

"I suppose the colonel will be pretty blue this morning. I'll go on up and pay him my respects."

As he looked over the trim camp, at the well bronzed, neat looking men, and thought of the hard working, smoothly running organization the colonel had made of this regiment in so short a time, his heart was heavy within him.

But Borrows met him at the door of the tent.

"You're just in time to go down with me and meet the new commanding officer," he announced crisply.

A fine figure of a soldier was Borrows, his skin a healthy tan from years of outdoor life, his body well knit and muscular; he looked every inch the highest type of trained professional officer, physically and mentally fit.

"Then it's true, Colonel?" Davies asked.

Borrows nodded, his face impassive.

"It's a blamed shame they can't let us alone," Davies sighed wearily. "You've made a splendid outfit out of this regiment. Seems rotten to take it away from you when all the hard work is over."

Borrows smiled ruefully.

"It's a little discouraging at times," he admitted, "but one gets accustomed to that in the Army."

THERE was the usual crowd of hangers on, mostly old men and women and prowling dogs and the ubiquitous Russian peasants traveling somewhere with their untidy bundles. The train pulled in.

There was a bustle and stir on the platform of one of the two passenger coaches. Several harrassed looking soldiers laden down with a weird assortment of bags, bundles and suitcases came tumbling off the train. They were followed by a sad eyed, fleshy faced officer, a man who seemed to have been born old and decrepit. He wore the silver eagles of a colonel.

He halted the soldiers.

"You've forgotten my lunch basket," he informed them patiently, his voice quavering as if reciting something of tragic import. "I told you to be especially careful of that." For a moment his weary face assumed something akin to a look of anger.

Saluting, Borrows introduced himself.

"Lieutenant Colonel Borrows, sir, and this is Major Davies, commanding the Third battalion of the regiment; he has—"

The new arrival received their introductions wearily.

"Yes, yes," he interrupted, "I would like to have my baggage taken to my tent immediately and a good orderly detailed at once, and please tell him that I must have two soft boiled eggs and toast promptly at noon, not five minutes before, nor five minutes after, but *at* noon."

"Quite so." Borrows stiffened ever so slightly. "We'll try to make you comfortable, Colonel."

Then, as they walked towards camp—

"I had issued orders for the regiment to resume the march tomorrow morning befor I received word that you were arriving. Do you want those orders to stand, or shall I have them countermanded?"

"No, we can't move tomorrow morning. I need at least a day to rest up after that trip from Vladivostok," Colonel Bagg countered very definitely.

Davies contrasted the colonel's trip in the comfortable train with the days the regiment had been hiking along on foot, but kept his thoughts to himself.

Borrows immediately had the great national flag and the blue silk regimental flag with its golden eagles moved from in front of his own tent to that of Colonel Bagg.

The men observed, but said nothing, of course. Only there was very little life in the regiment that night. What activity there was took place around the vicinity of Colonel Bagg's tent. A succession of orderlies had been detailed for the new arrival. Finally three men were picked by the old colonel. One was engaged in preparing a hot water bottle, another warmed the new commander's blankets at a cook fire, the third was busied in carrying various dishes back and forth from the kitchens, most of the dishes being sent back as too well cooked, or not cooked enough, or too well seasoned, or not well seasoned, so that the cooks and mess sergeant of the headquarters company were up in the air.

"Wonder if he thinks this is the Hotel Walled Off Astorbilt," growled the big mess sergeant.

CHAPTER V

COSSACK SABERS

THE SOLDIERS, with that skill at sizing up their officers that is so peculiar to the doughboy, immediately christened Colonel Bagg as "Excess Baggage", and the name flew like wildfire up and down the company streets.

There was little jollity in the regiment that night. The rain drizzled in a dispiriting pour, and the mud grew ever deeper.

In his own tent Davies lay stretched out on his damp cot, listening to the drip of water; and finally he went to sleep, dreaming of some halcyon day to come when no man would rise to the grade of colonel who put his own comfort above the well being of the men he commanded, and when no man should rise to any grade if he were not a leader of men.

Orders came, directing the regiment to entrain and proceed to Khabarovsk by rail. Davies rejoiced. At last he could catch up with the elusive Russian forces, with a chance of getting into action with the Bolsheviki. Colonel Bagg retired from view, sitting huddled near a camp stove and leaving the task of getting the regiment entrained to Colonel Borrows.

"I'm going to take the first two battalions on in the first two echelons, Davies, and I'm going to leave you the third echelon and all the trains and and animals." Borrows paused, then with an amused grin. "Also Colonel Bagg will remain behind to follow with your section."

Davies looked a little rueful.

"Never mind," comforted Borrows. "Build a fire in the officer's car and you won't see him at all."

There was one passenger coach allotted for the use of officers, and in this Davies had a fire made. Colonel Bagg needed no coaxing to make himself comfortable by the big stove. He remained there throughout the day, while the first and second battalions struck camp and entrained and did not show himself while the trains and animals were being loaded by the third battalion.

So long did the first two battalions take and so many were the delays in hunting cars and making up the various echelons, that night had fallen before Davies' battalion could start its labors. It had turned considerably colder, and a drizzling rain was falling.

Davies looked over the long rows of heavy escort wagons and all the wheeled transportation of the regiment, studied the hundreds of animals and then gazed thoughtfully at his men, wet and chilled and mud bespattered already. The only available loading place was a small area, soggy with rain. It was necessary first to build ramps on which the wagons could be pushed on to the flat cars.

The men worked half heartedly and dispiritedly. The officers were not much better. Time and time again, as the wagons were being loaded, Davies had to harden his heart and rout out soldiers who were hiding away somewhere, trying to keep warm and dry.

The rain increased; it poured down steadily.

AFTER hours of work in the darkness and mud, the wagons and carts were all aboard. While Davies checked them up to see whether they were all accounted for and none left behind in the darkness, about three-fourths of his men disappeared.

Again he went through the box cars, routing out shivering, huddled groups. The big job before them was to get the animals aboard. First came the horses. They were led up without much trouble, and tethered in the box cars. But the mules were a different matter.

The first great, long eared, philosophical looking beast advanced up the ramp confidently enough. He gave one look into the pitch blackness of the interior of the car. Then and there he decided that this was no place for a self-respecting mule, and away he backed, calm and unperturbed. Another mule was tried. His reactions were exactly the same. Shouting, beating and swearing did no good.

Davies sailed in, then, with blood in his eye. Calling to a gang of men, he had them carry up long beams of wood. A mule was led up on the ramp. The wooden beam was placed behind him. A squad of men attached itself to each end of the beam. At the command, "Shove!" Mr. Mule was shoved into the box car by main strength. Every mule of that regiment received the same treatment.

It was nearly two o'clock in the morning before the entire regimental transportation and the third battalion were entrained. Davies signaled the Russian crew to start the train. He did not realize until that moment how worn out he was.

He fairly staggered to the passenger car and pulled himself up the steps. He was soaked and chilled. So steadily had he

been shouting and giving commands that his voice was reduced to a husky whisper. Colonel Bagg, a blanket wrapped around him, a hot water bag at his feet, sat toasting himself by the stove. The old fellow looked up incuriously as Davies staggered in. The train started to move. Davies tried wearily to pull off his wet boots and found the job almost too much for him.

Suddenly the old colonel galvanized into action. Dropping the magazine which he had been reading, he began to search frantically through his belongings, finally stopping, baffled and grumbling to himself. Too tired to be much interested, Davies listened dully until he found that the whole scene was caused by a missing pat of butter, a pat of butter which the old man cherished as the apple of his eye and which had strangely and mysteriously disappeared from his well filled lunch basket. Davies had to grin in spite of himself, and went to sleep, still grinning.

THE TOWN of Khabarovsk seemed a real metropolis after the log hut villages that preceded it. It was the former military headquarters of the Amur district and possessed great numbers of barracks, stables and depots and still had a large Russian population. It had become the headquarters of the Ussuri Cossack forces under Kalmikoff and also the headquarters of the Japanese field army.

Here, for the first time, the Americans found themselves under the direct domination of the Japanese army commander. The agreement between the two nations specified that the Japanese were to assume control of tactical operations. But this was rather liberally construed by the Japanese to mean anything and everything. So this muddy Russian town was treated to the strange spectacle of white men serving under yellow men.

The Japanese insisted from the start that all communications should be in the French language. This rather complicated matters and resulted in increased work for Davies, who was the only officer with the regiment skilled in the use of the Gallic idiom. His men were settled in quarters, the well built brick barracks of the former Imperial Government, of which the only traces remaining were the great, black, double headed eagles above the barrack doors.

Associated with Davies, from the Japanese general staff, was a little captain named Yamogato. Exceedingly polite and courteous, he steadfastly insisted that he spoke nothing but French and Japanese. Davies maintained a healthy skepticism as to Yamogato's ignorance of English. One day, without warning, he flung some startling pieces of misinformation at the Japanese captain. In the eyes of the Oriental flashed a look that Davies knew well, the look of a man who has suddenly found three aces and a pair of jacks in a pat hand.

COLONEL BAGG set up his headquarters and kept out of the way. He did issue some very ferocious orders on the subject of maintaining friendly relations with the Japanese. According to these orders, it was a court martial offense to have any misunderstanding with the Orientals.

The Japanese military caste had absorbed a singular amount of the Prussian spirit, in copying the Prussian organization. Added to this, they had successively lorded it over Chinese, Koreans, and latterly, members of the white race itself in the person of the Russians. The Japanese felt that they were pretty good, which they were.

The trouble is that the average American soldier is possessed of a species of arrogance all his own, being convinced that an American is the finest flower of creation, and brooking no argument of the question whatsoever. It makes a wonderful fighter of the American soldier, but it leads to a good deal of friction when he has to dwell too close to allies having the same ideas of themselves. Davies wondered just how long the American doughboy would put up with the somewhat high handed methods of the

Japanese patrols and provost guards.

It is customary for allied officers to salute each other irrespective of rank, both officers endeavoring to salute simultaneously. Davies discovered after a day or two that the Japanese officers no matter of what grade, never saluted without first being saluted. A small thing, but the principle of military salutes generally being that the junior should salute first, the Japanese procedure rather tended toward discourtesy toward the representatives of another nation.

Whether or not it is necessary, there is a great deal of punctilio observed between officers of different nations, as the officer is very much the representative of the nation whose uniform he wears.

Colonel Bagg's orders made it almost a criminal offense for any American being a party to a misunderstanding with the Japanese. The Japanese soldiers and junior officers began unfortunately to misinterpret American respect for American orders into American fear of Japanese superiority.

The Italians, the British and the Chinese detachments in Siberia had had serious rows with the Japanese. The Italians and the Chinese, in fact, had fought regular pitched battles with the Mikado's men.

DAVIES talked it over seriously with Colonel Borrows one evening.

"We're outnumbered ten to one here in Khabarovsk," Davies remarked. "If a riot should start, there'd be hell popping and the trouble is one could never tell how far such a thing would go. Until business picks up on the Western front things will be ticklish over here."

"Yes," agreed Colonel Borrows thoughtfully, "we are sitting on a powder magazine, at that. If only the Japanese would be less cocky and unreasonable. Their latest atrocity has just come to light. They grabbed a couple of our men, handled them pretty roughly and kept them in jail for two days without reporting it to us."

"The hell you say!" Davies frowned; then looking up suddenly, said, "I suppose our commanding officer thanked them for their trouble?"

"Colonel Bagg does seem very much afraid of offending them," returned Borrows evenly, "but I'm afraid his very magnanimity will defeat its own ends. So far they don't seem to understand it. The temper of our men is none too good. You'd better warn them over at Japanese headquarters to lay off us. We don't want any big race riots around here."

"Listen here, Colonel," Davies asked seriously, "tell me something. Are we or are we not going to get a crack at the Bolsheviki?"

Borrows shrugged his shoulders wearily.

"It's on the knees of the gods. They are fighting up around Blagavostchenk now. We are ordered to remain here for the time being. How long that will be no one seems to know. Personally, I don't think Washington wants us to fight against the Bolsheviki. It looks to me like another one of those watchful waiting jobs."

The younger officer studied over this in silence. Well, he had enough to do to keep him busy, anyway. There was the Kalmikoff business to settle and his orders from Vladivostock to be executed.

DAVIES had wasted no time in carrying out his instructions to win over the Russians. He found this task somewhat simplified for him, due to the fact that he was a cavalry officer. Most of the Russian officers in Khabarovsk were formerly cavalry officers of the old Dragoon and Hussar regiments of the former Russian army. Many of them, in fact, were noblemen, some few having been officers in the Garde Chevalier itself.

They assumed that Davies, being the only cavalry officer with the American forces, must be some species of high ranking aristocrat in his own country. In Europe the cavalry is generally officered by noblemen. Therefore, they welcomed him into their midst very cordially, immediately making him a member of their club and insisting on his frequent

attendance at their dinners and parties.

So quickly did he win their good will that young Symonds, his battalion adjutant, was astonished one evening when they repaired together to the town's largest café. The place was full of Russian officers. As Davies entered they all rose, clicked their heels and bowed. Invitations came from every table, asking the Americans to join them. Glasses were raised all over the room. Many shouted—"*Vashi Darovia's!*" wishing him good health. There was something likeable and spontaneous about the warm hearted hospitality of Russians, such as Davies had found among few other peoples in the world.

The nearest table, filled with a group of officers, insisted that the Americans seat themselves, and Symonds met them all, not catching the names of any of them, except the first one, a tall, well built young officer, wearing among other decorations the Cross of St. Vladimir with its green ribbon, and carrying a hiltless curved saber studded with emeralds. His name was Alexieff and he commanded a *sotnia* of the Ussuri Cossacks.

Alexieff was a handsome Russian, with great sleepy eyes and a reckless careless air. He patted Davies on the back and, to Symonds' astonishment, the two immediately began to converse in Russian. When opportunity offered Symonds leaned over.

"Where did you learn their lingo?" he asked the major.

"I didn't learn it, worse luck," was the reply. "I've studied it off and on for two years and have been brushing up on it since, but it is one tough language. I can just manage to make myself understood and to understand about half of what is said to me, if they don't talk too fast."

One of the great attractions in the café was the Gipsy orchestra. Their music was marvelous, the first and second violins alone being worthy to rank with the finest of concert performers who came to the States. There were six of these musicians, and they played music that could tear out the very heart strings. Davies came regularly to listen to them.

An evening or two later he came to the café, and immediately noticed some very striking difference. Puzzled, he looked around. There was no orchestra. In lieu of the six musicians who had poured forth such golden melody there sat a lone girl who strummed on the piano.

"Where is the orchestra?" he asked Alexieff.

"Oh," replied the Russian officer lightly, "they were suspected of being Bolshevists and we took them out this morning and shot them."

Davies was astonished. The idea of killing those splendid musicians and stilling forever their golden harmony seemed sacrilege. But he was to learn that politics is a grim business in Russia, with no quarter asked for or granted.

ALMOST every night he dined with the various groups of Russian officers of Kalmikoff's force. This entailed no small amount of fortitude, as the pale and colorless vodka served at these parties had all the virulent potentialities of a Missouri mule. In addition, the Russians had a vile habit of toasting a guest frequently and ceaselessly, and it was considered bad form to reply in any way except by swallowing one's glass of vodka, immediately turning the glass upside down on the table to show its emptiness.

As Davies was there for a definite purpose, he could not let his wits get confused. After about the third or fourth hearty, "*Vashi Darovia Americanski Cavaleriste!*"—health to the American cavalryman—he quietly spilled the stuff under the table and managed thereby to gain a wonderful and undeserved reputation for capacity. It was not exactly a sporting trick, but he was on duty and felt his responsibility very keenly.

Alexieff was usually on these parties, and generally distinguished himself by getting fearfully and wonderfully drunk, whereupon he would kiss all his friends on both cheeks and weep, varying this procedure by chanting a war song, his favorite

being some old song about the Veliki Kniaz, or Great Prince, Mstislaff Romanov of Kiev, and how he was treacherously slain by the Voivode Ploskina, either one or both of these notabilities having been Alexieff's forbears.

Again, there would be a dance, and the Russian ladies would turn out, charming and beautiful and accomplished dancers. At one of these affairs Davies recognized the beautiful girl who had thrown the flowers under his horse's feet on the day of the parade through Vladivostock. She was frankly cordial, and throughout the evening she instructed the young American officer in the intricacies of the gay Russian dances.

Before the evening had progressed very far Davies had the uncomfortable feeling that some one had taken a powerful dislike to him. He finally located the individual, a tall and frowning young Russian officer who glared at him fiercely, twirling his mustaches the while.

"Who is the unfriendly looking chap?" he asked the girl.

"Oh, heem," she replied carelessly, "He is—what do you say?—in lofe with me. And he has brought me to the dance. I do not like heem. You will take me home, is it not?"

What could a man do? With what cordiality he could muster Davies acceded, of course, not being any too enthusiastic at mixing the feminine element with his duties, but humanly glad, at any rate, that the girl was beautiful.

The time came for the party to break up. Davies set forth with the girl. They had not gone more than half a square when he felt himself being followed. Looking back, he saw the scowling young Russian, accompanied by an equally tall and scowling friend. Both Russian officers wore their customary curved sabers which jingled musically with silver chains. Davies was completely unarmed. He chatted with what lightness he could muster as the two pursuers approached rapidly from behind.

Instead of closing with the American and the girl, they contented themselves with following along, four or five paces in the rear. They advertised their intentions by half drawing their sabers from the scabbards and then driving them back again with a steely clang.

The girl did not notice them. Davies did his best to keep up a light and inconsequential run of small talk with her, in spite of the reiterated *clang-clang* of the sabers so close behind. They continued up one street and down the other, moving out to a less lighted and more deserted part of the town. Just as Davies was figuring the quickest and most efficient way of defeating two swordsmen with nothing but two fists, he glimpsed two American soldiers approaching. They were provost guards, armed with rifles.

Stopping them, Davies conferred with the two in a low voice. Grinning, the provost guards fell in rear of the two Russian officers. Every time the Russians clanged their sabers the two guards clicked the breech bolts of their rifles.

The Russians finally gave it up and debouched on a side street, followed tenaciously by the soldiers, and the little party went clanging and clicking out of sight, leaving a vastly relieved Davies to take the girl home and depart, unmolested, for his own quarters.

CHAPTER VI

A MILITARY DIPLOMAT

OUT OF all these activities and his contact with the Russians, Davies gathered much information. The most important was that the Russians, rank and file, hated the Japanese intensely, remembering bitterly their overthrow in the Russo-Japanese war and their succeeding humiliations at Japanese hands. The second thing he accomplished was a steady and persistent propaganda, assuring the Russians that the Americans had no designs on Siberia or the Russian people, that the Americans desired above all things the trust and confidence of the Siberians.

Davies reported his findings to Vladi-

vostok. What he had still to find out was the strength of the Russian forces in Siberia and the agreements entered into by the Japanese and the Russian commander, Kalmikoff.

Calling at Kalmikoff's office one day, Davies found the trim Ataman of the Ussuri Cossacks in conference with several Japanese officers. Waiting until their departure, Davies was ushered in.

Kalmikoff rose very politely to receive him.

"My officers are so warm in your praise, Major, that I begin to fear for my overlordshop of the Cossacks," he smiled.

"They are very courteous to have shown me such hospitality, Ataman—" Davies bowed—"but I find there is a good deal of sympathy between Russians and Americans, that they are *ochinn simpatiska.*"

"Indeed yes," agreed Kalmikoff, but he shot a shrewd sidelong glance at the American as he spoke.

"My task here is to foster and increase that spirit," Davies went on calmly.

The Russian smiled understandingly.

"I had long ago reasoned that you were not here primarily to amuse yourself."

The Ataman presented Davies with one of those long tubed Russian cigarets, waiting patiently for what the American had to say.

"It is always best, Ataman, in these troubled times, to know who are and who are not your friends; am I not right?"

"Most assuredly," agreed the Cossack chieftain.

"I am speaking very frankly, Ataman, in case of any—er—disagreement in point of policy, between, say the Americans and any other Ally, to what extent could we count upon your support?"

This was a poser, as Davies intended it should be. The Cossack leader rose and paced the floor several times, in deep thought. Finally coming to rest again—

"You could count on our absolute neutrality," he announced.

"Well, that is something, at any rate."

Davies rose as if to take his leave. Turning suddenly and looking the Ataman calmly in the eyes, he asked—

"If the Americans were to subsidize your forces with an amount equal or greater than that now paid by the Japanese, could we count on more than absolute neutrality?"

The sudden question caught the Russian off his guard; he looked startled and dismayed. Davies quickly followed up his advantage.

"The Japanese inform me that they contribute ten thousand yen a week to the support of your forces."

The Ataman grew red with indignation.

"They told you a lie! They do not pay half that amount—not enough to keep my men decently fed!"

Davies blessed his long and careful training at poker, which had taught him to keep a straight face when he was putting over a bluff. He had learned almost everything he wanted to know. But there was one more thing. He had to learn the strength and armament of the Russians.

"That certainly is unfortunate," he commisserated. "I, of course, can do nothing but make recommendations; but it would strengthen my recommendation enormously if I could give a report of your strength, based upon my own observation. What I mean is that higher authority could more equably take care of your needs in case it should decide to do so."

The Ataman nodded.

"Of a surety," he agreed. "I will hold an inspection and review for you tomorrow morning at ten o'clock."

IT WAS a most successful visit. Davies again blessed the royal game of poker; it taught a man how to go into the game with little except courage. He got a report through to Vladivostok.

The next morning he mounted Peggy and rode out with his orderly to the cantonments of the Russian forces. At the entrance he was met by a group of officers; they were mounted on the small Siberian horses and wearing the long capes of the Russian cavalry. Among them, stiffly

at attention and the salute, as if a perfect stranger, was Alexieff. After returning the salutes, Davies galloped into the parade ground, followed by the Russians.

He scarcely had time to be aware of the fact that an immensely long line of cavalry, infantry and artillery was lined up and waiting, when a great shout went up from the soldiers. It was a peculiar, sustained, barking sort of roar that rose and fell as he listened. Knowing that it was some form of honor being rendered him, he came to a halt in front of the center of the line and held his hand at the salute.

The shouting continued for some little space, and he could begin to catch the words, something like, "Health and long life to your Excellency!"

The Cossacki Ussurki under arms made an impressive show. On the right of the line were the compact *sotnia's* of cavalry, the men in two ranks, gay in blue and gold, and with a forest of lances flaunting red and black pennons above them.

Next came the infantry in bearskin *shakos*, compact and solid, standing as if carved in stone, their long rifles carrying fixed bayonets which gleamed like a wall of silver. On the left of the line was a battalion of artillery, seemingly divided into about six batteries. The entire force made about the equivalent of a reinforced brigade. Davies knew that every man and officer was a veteran of many battles.

The band struck up a spirited march. Davies rode down, followed by the Russian officers, and inspected the entire line, examining the men and horses and guns. Once he dismounted and inspected several of the rifles, finding them pretty dirty. The field guns were of different models and different calibers, but seemed to be well provided with ammunition.

He noticed one peculiarity of the Russian soldier when being inspected; the eyes of every man in the ranks followed the inspecting officer as long as he was in sight.

The inspection finished, he asked that the troops be marched past. The band struck up a wailing march; the cavalry moved out, jingling at a trot, then broke into a gallop and went by with lances in rest, the men shouting. The infantry swung past in excellent order, and the field guns followed. Afterward cavalry, infantry and artillery went through their drills.

He was keenly interested in the Cossack formations and saw for the first time the famous *lava*, that bewilderingly rapid open style of fighting, used by the mounted Cossacks, in which they advance and retreat, open out and close in, in a rapid series of movements that would tend to confuse an enemy. The *lava* evidently is a heritage from the Tartar horsemen of the steppes; there is something wild and free about it, like the swoop of falcons.

The Cossacks seemingly did not have a banner, but carried a sort of mace, a heavily carved thing of ebony and ivory, which was guarded by two officers with drawn sabers. Almost idolatrous respect was paid to this object. It looked not unlike the battle eagles carried by the old Roman legions.

AS WAS natural, Davies compared the Cossack forces before him with his own beloved squadron back in the Philippines. The Cossacks had smaller horses and were armed with the lances, sabers and carbines. His own men were mounted on stronger horses, carried rifles which they were skilled in using, sabers which they were not so skilled in using and carried the automatic pistol which was a death dealing affair, far superior to the lance. He came to the conclusion that a squadron of American cavalry, properly handled, could "clean up" on the whole force before him.

The formal review was followed by games and exhibitions of riding. Davies remembered many of these latter from the days of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show and its squad of Cossack riders. The men before him were wonderfully adept at trick riding—standing on their heads in the saddles at a gallop, hanging under the horses' bellies, forming pyramids on one

another's shoulders and going through a variety of hair rising stunts.

The Russian officers joined them and performed as well as the men. Undoubtedly their performance was superior to the "monkey drill" of the American cavalryman. But Davies, looking over their small horses, decided that there was one thing at which they were not adept.

Peggy, Davies' mare, could jump very satisfactorily. There was a wooden fence near at hand of about the right height for a smooth jump. Without saying a word, Davies turned Peggy toward it, swung her into a smart canter and put her at it. She skimmed it like a bird. A shout went up from the officers and men behind him. He turned to see them watching him delightedly, their own stunts forgotten.

Davies wondered swiftly whether he had forgotten his monkey drill. It was worth taking a chance at it for the sake of winning the approbation of these people, respect for the Americans.

Turning, he came back toward the fence again. When about ten yards from it, he leaped to the ground with one hand on the pommel of the saddle and one hand on Peggy's mane. He raced along with her as she approached the fence. Just as she started to gather for the leap over it, Davies vaulted into the saddle, sitting with arms folded as the mare topped the fence. As she landed on the far side again, he leaped to the ground, running easily and lightly alongside.

Once more he vaulted, this time rising completely over the mare's back and landing on the off side. Vaulting again into the saddle, he picked up the reins and rode easily up to the group of officers who immediately surrounded him on all sides, wildly enthusiastic.

He heard shouts of:

"Hoorah! Hoorah! Amerikanski Cavalerist! Hoorah!"

The Russians looked at the size of his horse, nearly again as large as their own. They rode down and examined the fence, shaking their heads at what seemed its impossible height, and were plainly impressed. Jumping fences was one thing the Cossack man or officer did not do.

Barracks and stables were inspected; and then came the inevitable Russian tea in the officer's quarters. Here the Ataman Kalmikoff showed up and was treated with vast respect by his officers. Davies and he chatted for a moment or two, then several of the officers drew the Ataman aside. There was an earnest colloquy for a few moments. The Ataman nodded and returned to Davies.

"My officers and I request that you will remain and be our guest at a banquet at which they wish to hold a little ceremony in your honor."

Davies agreed, and the Ataman left to return to his headquarters.

THE BANQUET started with the inevitable *zakuska*, quantities of bread and butter and caviar and salads and smoked fish, washed down with copious drafts of vodka. They then repaired to the table, where Cossack orderlies served the dinner, and the speeches commenced. These were long drawn out, sonorous affairs, of which Davies could make out an occasional word.

As the vodka began to work, the tempo of the party increased. The men broke into song, all holding out their glasses and waving toward Davies as the chorus was shouted forth. Between speeches and songs a soldier orchestra of six or seven pieces played gay Russian and Gipsy airs on their *balalaikas*.

The great table was colorful with the blue and gold of their uniforms, and the flashing of jeweled and enameled decorations. A thunderstorm was in progress outside, so that the songs were shouted out to drown the roar of the rain.

Finally there was a pause, and the senior Russian officer present, a *polkovnik*, or colonel, rose gravely to his feet. A hush fell over the table. The white bearded colonel spoke at great length. At each of his perorations, every one turned and looked at Davies, nodding enthusiastically and smiling in good fellowship. Finally the colonel came to a dramatic pause. He barked out an order.

The folding doors at the end of the hall were opened. In the doorway stood two officers with drawn sabers. Between them another officer carried the ebony and ivory mace which served the Cossacks in lieu of a standard.

Every one, including Davies, rose to attention. The mace was carried around the table. The *polkovnik* came forward and led Davies by the hand up to the Cossack symbol. Here he spoke again. Davies, not knowing what was expected of him, bowed.

Suddenly the mace was carried out. A wild *"Hoorah! Hoorah! Hoorah!"* broke out from the assembled officers. The old colonel turned and gave Davies the fraternal kiss on both cheeks; the other officers crowded up, cheering and shouting. They embraced him and each repeated the kiss. It was a tough ordeal, but finished at last, and he was led back to his seat. A sudden flashing of sabers, and every officer mounted his chair, saber in one hand and glass in the other and to a prolonged crashing cheer, Davies' health was drunk.

The old colonel called for silence. The officers resumed their seats.

"You are now a blood brother and a member of the Cossacks of the Ussuri. Your friends are our friends; your enemies are our enemies. I welcome you into this brotherhood of warriors."

He thanked them for the signal honor they had conferred upon him. He told them of his deep appreciation, and went on at length expressing his pleasure as gracefully as he could in French and Russian.

"I am taking you at your word," he ended, "when you say that my friends are your friends, and that my enemies are your enemies. If the time should come that the Americans in Siberia should be set upon by a powerful foe, I want you to remember that. May I call upon you then?"

A shout of assent followed. Before its echoes had time to die away a sudden silence fell. Every one stood at attention. Davies rose politely as Kalmikoff appeared in the doorway.

"As Ataman of the Ussuriki Cossacki, I welcome you, Major Davies, to this honorable brotherhood. As head of the Siberian provisional government military forces, I am taking this opportunity to confer upon you an ancient and honorable Russian decoration."

Saying which, he unfastened a decoration from his own blouse. Striding up to Davies, he pinned on the American officer's chest an enameled cross, pendent on a bright colored ribbon. The Russians went wild with enthusiasm.

AS DAVIES made his way to his own quarters that night, the cheers and shouts of the Cossack officers still ringing in his ears, he calmly began to figure out the value of the evening's demonstration. His instructions were to win over the Russians. It certainly looked as if he had accomplished his task. It was impossible that they would ever side against the Americans in case of trouble, and it seemed extremely likely that they would side with them. So far, so good.

Before going to bed he wrote out a full report of the whole matter for headquarters at Vladivostok, giving the strength, armament, degree of discipline and training of the Russian forces, and their sentiments. Their discipline made him curious. It seemed to be a one man discipline, and to be based on a very lively respect for the Ataman. Officers and men trembled abjectly before his cool, impersonal bearing.

A few days later Davies was to find out why they trembled. For he missed Alexieff, the young commander of one of the *sotnias*, whose gay, careless, defiant smile and handsome figure had been so familiar a sight every night at the café or the club. It vaguely perturbed him, for he really liked this dashing young Russian.

Having occasion to call upon Kalmikoff about this time, he asked about Alexieff, expressing a wish to know where he had hidden himself.

"Oh, he? He is dead," replied Kalmikoff, carelessly flipping the ash from his cigaret.

"Dead?" Davies was shocked. "What did he die of; I didn't know he was sick?"

Kalmikoff smiled.

"He died of a very sudden sickness," he admitted; then very brutally, "I had him taken out and shot last Monday morning."

Davies thought that his hearing had been at fault.

"What?" he gasped. "Shot!"

"Yes," replied Kalmikoff patiently, "he was drinking too much."

"But surely—drinking—that's a terribly severe punishment—"

Davies could hardly realize that he had heard the truth.

"Oh, my friend," Kalmikoff said indulgently, "you do not understand the Russian; he must be ruled with a rod of iron." And that was that.

"The Japanese situation grows no better hourly," confided Colonel Borrows to him next day. "Every time they pull some stunt on our men, Colonel Bagg punishes the men and expresses his sorrow to the Japanese, and the situation immediately grows worse. If I am not mistaken, there's going to be trouble if they don't lay off American soldiers."

"Looks to me like trouble has already started," Davies volunteered. "I saw three husky men out of A Company knock a whole platoon of Japanese infantry into the mud. The Japs were all for hogging the sidewalk, and the Americans would not be pushed off into the street. You know these little narrow sidewalks high above the muddy roadway? People can pass each other, if each one gives a little bit. The Japanese pushed the first American off, and his friends did a flying wedge through the rest of the outfit. I'm afraid it means a lot of translating for me."

CHAPTER VII

OFFICERS' COMPLIMENTS

THE NEXT morning, Yamogato, the associate Japanese liaison officer turned up, somewhat embarrassed, bearing a letter written on heavy, white, rice paper, addressed in excellent French to the American commander. Davies read it through, frowning.

"This is pretty strong stuff for one Ally to be sending another," he remarked mildly enough to Yamagato.

"*Je suis desole!*" Yamogato bowed and hissed politely.

"Well, here goes!"

Davies carried it in to Colonel Bagg. The old colonel sat hunched up at his desk, staring out vacantly through the window, the heavy pouches under his eyes giving his face the look of a sad eyed hound. He looked uncomprehendingly over the letter and handed it back for Davies to translate.

It was bad enough in the more polite French. In the direct English it was startling. It was an arrogant demand upon the American commander to apologize deeply for the brutality and lack of discipline of the American soldiers, and to give assurances that they would behave in a less barbarous fashion in future.

In truth it was a startling document for an Ally to send to another. Davies' face was pale with anger when he finished translating it.

Old Colonel Bagg's face was pale as well. But it was pale with fear. He was huddled up, looking like a frightened rabbit.

"Oh!" he wailed. "They'll complain to the War Department and I'll be reprimanded! Why can't these men behave themselves?" he mourned.

"But, Colonel," expostulated Davies, "I saw the incident which this letter has reference to. The Japanese were clearly at fault in starting it."

"Why don't our men stay off the streets then? They ought to be confined to their barracks."

The colonel looked so woebegone that Davies thought the weak old man would burst into tears at any moment. But Colonel Bagg sat silent and worried for a space, then reached for pencil and paper.

"I'll write them out an apology," he half whispered. "Maybe that will calm them down."

Davies stiffened imperceptibly.

"I'm afraid you're making a mistake, Colonel," he expostulated respectfully. "An apology will only add fuel to the fire. Our men are in a pretty dangerous temper as it is, and a few more overt acts on the part of the Japanese will precipitate trouble."

The colonel turned a glassy stare on him, the glassy stare of a man who hears not, and bent to his paper without replying.

He wrote, scratched out and rewrote. Finally he looked up.

"This will straighten it out." He handed the paper to Davies. "Translate that immediately into French and get it off immediately, before they do anything more against us."

BOWING silently, Major Davies took the paper and went to the outer office. Here he read it through. It was an abject and crawling apology, a tacit admission that the Americans were wrong and the Japanese right, as usual. It apologized humbly for the excesses of the American troops, ascribing them to youthful ebullition of spirits and promising that such outbreaks would not occur in future.

It made Davies' gorge rise. As a man with some experience in life, he realized the futility of trying to avoid trouble by running away from it. As an officer with considerable experience with non-white races, he knew that a soft answer seldom turns away wrath. From what he had seen of the Japanese, he knew that they would respect firmness. Quite naturally, being the stronger, they desired to dominate the Allied forces in Siberia, and were simply feeling out the temper of the Americans.

He was tempted to tear up the colonel's apology and write one of his own. But disobedience of orders, with its resulting court martial and disgrace, was no light thing to incur. For a long time he sat silent at the desk. Then he wrote out a translation. Taking it into Colonel Bagg, that worthy looked it over and signed it.

"Send this immediately," he ordered.

Instead of sending it, Davies put it in his pocket, ordered his horse and rode to Japanese headquarters, accompanied by his orderly.

"I would like to see the chief of staff," he notified the officer in attendance. "The higher, the fewer," he quoted to himself.

After a short delay he was ushered in to a large office in which a bulky Japanese officer rose very politely to greet him.

The officer was a major general; his shrewd and clever face was dominated by a pair of great round eyes that had all the appearance of the eyes of a cat, so intense were they and so expressionless.

But he spoke English perfectly, with all the cultured inflections of the speech of Oxford.

"I am honored," he said, as Davies introduced himself; he then asked his guest to be seated, hospitably offering the American officer a cigar.

The Japanese officer was quite the finest type of Japanese that Davies had met so far.

"General—" Davies had lighted the cigar—"if all officers were required to give Allied visitors cigars of such excellence as this, little questions of international harmony would never arise."

The Japanese smiled and leaned back in his chair. Davies looked quietly into his eyes.

"The Japanese are a wonderful people," he said.

"I thank you," replied the major general, wondering what was coming.

"They are a proud people and a courageous people," went on Davies.

"But no more so than the Americans," replied the Japanese, not to be outdone.

"Good!" replied Davies. "We are agreed on those two points, are we not?"

"Most assuredly," the Japanese answered.

"But in perfect frankness we both have to admit that we possess inferior and rowdy exceptions in both our nations. Am I not right?"

"Unfortunately, yes, we are neither one free from that disadvantage."

"But both nations are fortunate in possessing sane and temperate people at the top who can be depended upon to keep the more rowdy element in control," Davies continued relentlessly.

"Indeed, yes, we are both fortunate in that," the Japanese agreed.

"That being the case, then, you and I, who are representatives of the saner element, should find no difficulty in obviating the petty discords caused by the intemperence of our respective hotheads."

"None whatsoever," echoed the Japanese, and his voice was hearty and frank.

DAVIES drew from his pocket the Japanese demand for an apology and held it in his hand.

"I have here a note sent by one of your hotheads in reference to the combined doings of some American and some Japanese hotheads. I take it to have been written by some junior officer, unversed in the polite amenities customary between allies, for it is rather intemperately worded.

"Of course, my commanding officer was upset about it, imagining that it came from your high command; but I assured him that such could not have been the case. The wording and tone of it showed that it was undoubtedly the work of some unauthorized junior."

"May I see it?" requested the Japanese, and Davies handed it over.

It was read slowly and thoughtfully. There was a long silence. The Japanese finally coughed.

"It was indeed most sensible of you to bring this immediately to my attention." The major general spoke smoothly, without a flicker of his eyes. "As you say, it is undoubtedly the work of some junior officer. I can assure you that he will be punished. I regret exceedingly that this communication caused your commanding officer any annoyance."

"I certainly appreciate your attitude in the matter—" Davies bowed—"but as it has unfortunately caused my commanding officer no small amount of worry, just between you and myself, I think it would help things greatly if the Japanese commander would make it a point to personally allay my commander's natural perturbation over the affair."

There was a momentary silence. The Japanese finally nodded.

"Quite right," he agreed. "You can inform your commanding officer that mine will call on him tomorrow and express his regrets."

Then, as Davies started to rise, the Japanese protested:

"I've been saving a most excellent bottle of Scotch for just such an occasion. Can't you join me in a drink to the good relations between our two nations?"

"Consider me as prevailed upon," Davies responded gravely, sitting down again.

The Japanese clapped his hands. An orderly appeared instantly. He was given some instructions in guttural Japanese. He hissed politely, bowing himself out, and returning immediately with bottles and glasses.

As they toasted each other, the Japanese looked at Davies' blouse.

"I don't see your new Russian decoration," he remarked blandly.

Davies stared down as if in surprise.

"Quite so, I must have forgotten it," he replied easily. "It was very nice of them to decorate me. I find them very friendly. The English, the Russians and the Americans seem to have hit up a *rapprochement* almost immediately." He raised his glass. "Here's hoping the Japanese will not insist upon making them play by themselves, but will come in and make it a foursome."

The face of the Japanese was absolutely impassive. He drank the toast solemnly.

"I can answer for the Japanese," he said finally. "They have no desire whatsoever to play a lone hand against that combination. You will find my people playing with the Americans, the British and the Russians."

THE NEXT day a very much surprised Colonel Bagg received an official visit from the Japanese commander

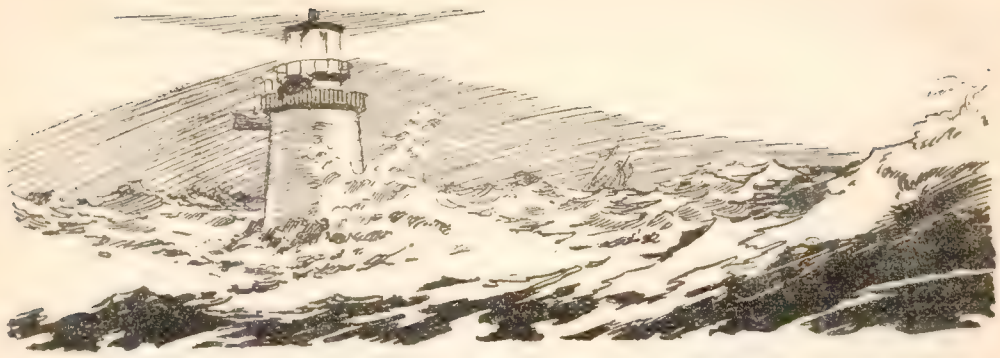
who came grandly to American headquarters, accompanied by a large staff of officers, all in luxurious yellow limousines. Colonel Bagg faced the deputation uncertainly. He was rather knock-kneed and paunchy; the pouches under his eyes gave him an air of exceeding sorrow. He was not exactly an impressive figure.

The Japanese commander, his breast covered with decorations, a beautiful Samurai blade, in his hand, spoke his little piece very correctly. Colonel Bagg never did know what it was all about. Fortunately, Davies stood by and made the reply fitting to the occasion. The deputation rolled away as grandly as it had come.

From then on, a new spirit of mutual toleration grew up between the American and the Japanese soldiers. It could not be called a liking, but it was something as effective—mutual respect.

When next Davies arrived in Vladivostok it seemed to him that an uncalled for amount of fuss was made over his work in the field.

"What gets me," remarked Winfield, "is what system you use in bamboozling all these people."



OVERTIME

When eternal darkness came to the keeper of the light

By FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

TWILIGHT was fading. Slowly, even reluctantly fading. Warning men to prepare for darkness. And thus was fading the twilight of John Law's vision. Alone in his lighthouse tower Old John was preparing.

The first warning, a blurring of objects like the sea smothering a reef, had filled him with horror. It was not the horror of eternal darkness. A lighthouse keeper's battle with darkness never ceases. It was the fear of being removed from the lamp he had watched over nearly fifty years; fear of being sent to the greater darkness of a peopled world—a world where human beings created in the image and likeness of God did not speak to one another, though all were alike and shoulder brushed shoulder in passing.

Fear of removal swept him like a wave, smashed him as a breaking sea smashes wreckage and left him a drifting derelict. He stood with gnarled hands gripping an iron rail and saw fog, though he knew no fog drifted off the cape today. The wind, unbroken in its thousands of miles of sweep, split against the concrete tower. It swayed him like a tree with broken roots.

"No!" he snarled. "They won't take me from here!"

He rubbed his eyes and dimly made out the exact spot from which to leap. A falling body would not be shattered and broken against the rocks, for here the sea would surge up with open arms to receive its own. It would hold its own forever. In his broken condition he poised, then he remembered his light. In nearly fifty years no light in John Law's keeping had failed. He remembered that few men had seen him, but countless thousands had caught the friendly gleam of his light. They said, "Old John's light never fails!" Greater tribute than the pinning of a beribboned medal on the breast.

No, the light could not fail, even though his own was flickering and would die. He

was almost mad with fear. Each man has his goal. John Law's goal was fifty years' unbroken service. Another six months and attainment.

"My day's done," he muttered. "Anything I do from now on will be overtime. But they won't take me away. I'll wait until the tender comes with stores and with Sheridan and when they take my arm to lead me away I'll jump." He nodded sagely. "Yes, I'll jump."

High above the sea tending the light, he had found contentment. Beneath the sea he would sleep. But first he must prepare for the overtime.

It was not as difficult as it at first seemed. Sometimes he groped, but if he just remembered he was blind and moved instinctively as he had done so many years, his duties were easily enough performed. His light burned as steadily as ever. With the discovery came hope; and with hope, conviction. He clutched it wildly, then realized just how badly he wanted to live and work—overtime.

Looking down upon the sea with sightless eyes he demanded—

"What's man given sight for?"

He listened for the answer. It came in the thunder of a breaking wave and a dash of wind tossed surf spraying his face; came in the cry of a friendly gull wheeling around the tower.

"Sight is needed to direct the hand, teach the mind and show man the beauty of life."

He told himself the hand needed no direction, the mind no teaching; for each day his duties were faithfully performed, each night his lamp burned. And he needed no vision to understand the beauty of his sea, his reef, his tapering tower rearing upward like a mighty gun. He knew the wind and its moods. He did not need to see the gathering storm; he sensed it. The twilight cries of the birds told the hour the lamp should be lighted. No other hour of day or night has the peculiar freshness of dawn.

And Old John wondered whether trusting to instinct and resisting the desire to grope he might not deceive even the sharp eyed Inspector Sheridan. Perhaps he might work overtime another six months and round out his fifty years' service.

At the thought his sightless eyes danced; his weather beaten face wrinkled in a gentle smile. A blind man was unfit to tend a light, but he was not blind, though the delicate nerves supplying his own light had failed.

OLD JOHN LAW stood above the spot where the sea waited to receive its own. The tower behind was splitting the wind. He listened intently, and across the water came the deep blast of the tender's whistle. How many times he had watched her creep in, fathom by fathom. He waved his hand because he knew they were waving at him. He knew the small boats were ready to be launched. They were ladened with six months' supplies. Sheridan would be aboard. The test was at hand.

His manner was not that of a man groping in darkness, but that of one who could see. He ran to the gasoline hoisting engine and started it. He ran the steel fall up and down to loosen the blocks. Then he waited until he knew the small boats were approaching. He ran along a ledge so narrow that a slip meant death —but he ran.

Again he listened, a welcoming smile on his face. Presently he heard the swish of the lead of the heaving line. He ducked his head but shot out his arm with a peculiar downward movement and felt the line slipping along his ribs. He hauled in hand over hand and made the bowline fast. Then he ran back again and lowered the fall. When one of two tightly twisted wires touched his hand he knew he had lowered enough. He waited for the command—

"Haul away!" The engine coughed its protest, and he knew a sling load of men was coming up. He let the fall slip through his hand until the second wire struck, then he ceased hauling. With a hand line he pulled the sling in and lowered away. A tremendous sigh escaped his lips. By instinct he had landed a

sling load of men. But greater tests were ahead.

He heard Sheridan's voice. It was crisp when it gave orders. Friendships did not count—only efficiency. This a man must give or he was replaced. Nothing could stand in the way of successful service.

Sheridan was coming. He could hear the click of his heels on the rock. Sheridan had a way of shaking hands and dropping his left hand on the other's shoulder while he looked searchingly into a man's eyes, as if to assure himself all was well and no trouble lay hidden. Secret trouble might lessen service efficiency. John Law thrust forth his hand and felt it gripped. Then a hand fell on his shoulders.

"John, you're looking great!" Sheridan cried.

"I'm feeling great," John answered.

Next Sheridan would offer him a cigar. This frightened him. He might grope, might fumble in accepting it. He did a thing no man had ever done to Sheridan—brushed his fingers along the man's chest, found the cigars and took one.

"I'm presumin' on friendship," John Law muttered, "but I'm dyin' for one good cigar—just one."

A silence fell between them while John Law lighted the cigar. He wondered if Sheridan suspected. Again fear surged through him.

"We'll look around, sir. You won't be able to stay long—bad blow coming up."

He led off, but his hand lingered a moment on the railing where the sea waited to take its own. They would not lead him away. In a few minutes he would know just how much he had deceived Sheridan. In a few minutes he would be working overtime—or in the sea. He would have to leap suddenly or they would stop him.

THEY entered the tower and climbed the winding stairway to the lamp. John Law looked toward the sea when they reached the tower. He heard Sheridan say—

"Pardon me, John!"

He wondered what Sheridan had done to offer an apology.

"That's all right, sir!" he answered, wondering.

His heart was thumping in his ears. Again he looked toward the sea.

"The boys will have to hurry, sir. That blow's coming up fast."

"You can see a storm a long way, John."

"Yes, I can—see—farther than most men," John Law answered.

How the time dragged! The rumble of the hoists and the rattle of cases and oil drums came incessantly.

"Another thing, John, you'd better not run along that ledge the way you usually do. A slip means death, and you're not as young as you used to be. Right now you're working overtime."

John Law's heart stopped, faltered, then beat furiously.

"Yes," he said, "overtime. But a little overtime doesn't hurt any of us."

Every moment he expected Sheridan to take his arm and say, "Come, John; I know!"

The wind was howling about the tower.

"Look!" he cried. "It's a mass of whitecaps out there."

"Yes, John, a beautiful sight!"

"Bad blow, sir! I remember one other, sir. Solid water swept over the tower and rocks torn from the reef smashed the screens I put around the light. You know the birds become confused, sir, and fly into the beam."

Silence! And John Law could not bear silence. He felt that Sheridan was searching his face when they were not talking. He led off once more, pointing to this thing or that, always pointing, never groping. He spoke frequently of the weather. The storm was increasing. They descended. Another period of silence, with their hands on the rail—above the spot where the sea waited for its own.

"John!"

The word sounded like a death sentence. He felt Sheridan's hand grip his arm. In turn he gripped the rail, ready to spring.

"John! You've been with us a long time. You were here before I was born. Your light has never failed."

"No—it's never failed. I'm worried!" John Law spoke hastily. "I'm afraid you won't get out, sir. Feel that wind!"

"The last sling load is coming up, John."

Reaction. He was almost breaking from the strain. He ran out and waved his arms like a woman shooing chickens.

"Off with you, lads! Off with you! I'll stow this! Off with you!"

He thrust Sheridan toward the net, then he ran to the hoists. Sheridan seemed about to speak but the rumble of the gears silenced him. They were gently lowered to the waiting boat and the fall cast off. Old John Law came to the ledge, then ran swiftly along the ragged edge. His hand jerked at the loop of the bowline where it tugged at a cleat. He jerked it clear and dropped it into the sea.

Sheridan watched him breathlessly.

"Pretty old for that sort of thing," he muttered. "Yes and—"

Sheridan did not finish. A wave had smothered the reef; the spray concealed half the tower. He could not see John Law kneeling just above where the surging sea waited to claim its own. He could not hear John Law's words, as with upturned face he thanked his God for another six months of contentment.

But as the tender hurled back the seas and fought her way to safety, Sheridan stood on the bridge. He watched blackness settle over a blacker sea, except where the waves rode with white plumes shoreward.

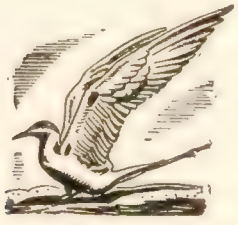
"Poor John," he said softly. "For the first time in fifty years his light has failed."

The second officer's alert ear heard the words. He glanced across the troubled sea to the cape where Old John's friendly light flashed.

"Old John's light is burning, sir!" he sang out.

The inspector started as if from a dream.

"Ah, yes, Mr. Wallace, Old John's light is burning. Another six months and it will have burned fifty years."



Continuing

TEXAS MAN

A Powerful Novel of Early Arizona

By WILLIAM MACLEOD RAINE

THE Quinn brothers, Whip and Russ, dictated the law in the town of Tough Nut; and when Boone Sibley, rugged son of Texas pioneers, thrashed their right hand man, Curt French, in a fair fight, they decided Boone was dangerous to their interests. They advised him to leave town. He stayed.

Soon afterward, the Bisbee stage was held up and the driver killed. The Quinns spread the report that the two men who did it looked very much like Boone Sibley and his friend, Dusty Rhodes; they induced the sheriff to post a reward of three thousand dollars for Boone, five hundred for Rhodes. The reward for Boone read "*dead* or alive." They knew the lawless element would prefer to take a fighter like Boone *dead*.

Boone and Dusty rode to Galeyville to clear themselves. They were attacked by a crowd intent on claiming the reward. Dusty was wounded; Boone was besieged in a store where he had fortified himself. Night came on, and capture seemed imminent, when Tilatha McLennon, a girl he had recently saved from Mexican vaqueros, climbed over some roof tops, reached Boone unseen, and directed him to where she had a horse waiting. Boone, in Mexican sombrero and serape, made his escape to Tough Nut.

He had little trouble convincing Tom Turley, owner of the paper, the *Gold Pocket*, that he was innocent. The sheriff was called in and Boone gave himself up, presenting an alibi: Dusty and he had been far from the scene of the holdup, and

had run into two old prospectors who could verify this statement. They were found, and verify it they did. Boone was released. Turley published an account of the exoneration in his paper.

Infuriated, the Quinns charged him with trying to shield an outlaw, and incited a mob to run the editor out of town. Mobeetie Bill, a fine old ex-Confederate soldier and filibuster, who was at the Turley home at the time, quickly put out the lamp, told the editor and his niece to remain quiet, and went to an open window to address the crowd. Curt French was leading them, and he roared:

"Don't argue with me, you old fool. I'm comin' to drag him out immediate!"

And then without a word, Eve Turly, the editor's niece, slipped into the hall and stepped out into the moonlight, standing slim and white, like an apparition, alone before the angry mob.

CHAPTER XXIV

MOBEETIE BILL DRAWS A BLACK BEAN

THE EFFECT of Eve's sudden appearance, of her broken appeal, was startling. The wild frontier always respected good women. They were as safe as though they were in God's pocket. The worst outlaw, if there was any hint of manhood in him, would go far to aid and succor any of them in need. This girl's youth, her charming helplessness, an air of innocence enhanced by her simple white dress touched by the magic of moonlight, all reached them as though they had been well calculated stage devices.

Even Curt French was taken aback. He glared sullenly at her, while his slow brain groped with the problem. A bully and ruffian, a killer never deterred by moral distinctions as to fair play, his impulse was to crush her and push on to his purpose. But he knew that would not do. Vaguely he was aware that the men behind him were sentimentalizing the situation. She was not just a fool girl to them; she was for the moment the embodiment of an ideal they had been cherishing in their hearts through the sodden years.

"Now Missie, you-all better run along somewheres. We 'low to have a li'l talk with yore uncle," he wheedled. "Jes' a li'l talk about business, y'understand."

"No—no!" Her refusal went past him to the men behind. It was as though she knew that she might win them but not their leader. "You won't do him any harm, will you? If you understood—if you knew how good he is—"

"We know he's backin' up this killer Sibley," some one flung back.

"But he just asked you to wait, not to make up your minds too soon. I'm only a girl. I don't know anything about it." Her voice broke in a little wail. "But I know my uncle is good—and—and you mustn't hurt him."

"This yere is a he-man town," another man growled. "We don't aim to let him run it like a kid's school, an' then renig when he feels like it."

"Cripes, no!" French flung out an oath. "Nor he cain't hide behind a woman's skirt. Outa the way, girl. We won't hurt you none, but we aim to get Turley."

He took two steps forward, then stopped. Some one had come around the corner of the building, vaulted lightly to the porch and was standing beside Eve.

The killer's jaw dropped. Never in his turbulent life had he met such a surprise as this. The man who had joined the girl was Boone Sibley.

It was a murmur to begin with, the sound that swept the crowd, then as the name passed from one to another it became a roar. Before the harsh menace of it Eve shrank back, appalled. But not the Texan. He faced the rising storm of rage silently, eyes undaunted, poised figure motionless. He made no gesture toward a weapon.

The house door opened. Mobeetie Bill came out, caught Eve by the shoulders, whirled her body and pushed her into the passage. He grinned at Boone.

"Looks like a pleasant time was gonna be had by all," he drawled.

"What you doing here?" demanded Boone.

"Or you, comin' down to cases?" the old man retorted. His faded blue eyes were blazing with excitement.

There was an upheaval in the mob, a shrill outcry, and from it broke two men. They ran past French to the porch.

"Not the right fellow," one screamed, and the other, "We're alibi-in' this bird." They were the two old prospectors, Hassayampa Pete and Toughfoot Bozeman.

French threw a wild shot from the holster—a second—a third. In the moonlight his distorted shadow was like some malignant creature conjured from hell.

Mobeetie Bill tried to steady himself, caught at the wall, began to slide down. With incredible swiftness Boone's Colt was out and booming. He fired twice, then stopped.

French had dropped his six-shooter and was clutching at his elbow, face distorted with pain.

A voice shouted.

"Stop shootin'. Listen! Listen to me, you damn' fools!" Sheriff Brady pushed through the crowd and raised his hands. "Listen! Listen!"

Hassayampa Pete had snatched up the fallen gun of the killer. Boone dropped the barrel of his revolver toward the floor and stood waiting. French cursed, bitterly, savagely.

"Listen, you woodenheads!" the sheriff ordered, his words carrying to every one present. "He's not the man that killed Buck—this Sibley here. Not the guy that held up the stage. Him nor Dusty neither. They were forty miles away at the time. In the desert near Sugarloaf, talkin' to Pete an' Bozeman at their camp when the stage was stopped. Step up, Bozeman. You tell 'em."

Bozeman told them, and after him Hassayampa Pete. Sibley's alibi was established beyond doubt.

"Who did it then?" some one demanded sullenly, "since you know so doggone much, Brady?"

"I'll tell you tomorrow," the sheriff answered. Then, abruptly, "Don't you, Curt! Don't you! I'll sure drap you in yore tracks."

Brady had snatched out his gun and was covering French. The bad man had drawn a long barreled .45 from under his shoulder. He had done it with his left hand, awkwardly and slowly, because his right was disabled.

"Take that gun from him, some one," the sheriff ordered. "You, with the brown hat. Take it, can't you? Now bring it here."

"I'll sure fix you for this, Brady," the bad man swore, "if it's the last thing I ever do!"

The sheriff did not answer him. He addressed the crowd.

"You better drift, boys, don't you reckon? You're doing yoreselves no good here. Turley was right. He told the truth, but you were hell bent on believin' Sibley guilty. So you had to get all het up an' go off half cocked. I sure hope you-all are proud of yoreselves. Me, I'd say you'd ought to be put to bed an' spanked real thorough."

Some one laughed and broke the tension. From that moment the danger was past. The crowd began to thin away. French went nursing his elbow and threatening vengeance.

Already Boone was on his knees supporting the old buffalo hunter.

"Hit bad, old-timer?" he asked in a low voice.

Mobeetie Bill's cracked laugh answered.

"Not bad, Texas man, but good—good an' thorough. I got aplenty."

Boone picked him up, carried him into the house and followed Eve into her room. Gently he put the old man down on the bed.

"Has some one gone for a doctor?" Turley asked.

"No use," the old fellow answered. "I'm headin' fast for the divide. You stay with me, Texas man. The trail's gettin' steep—an' it's dark. I got to find the way home."

Already his mind was beginning to wander.

"I'll go get doc," the sheriff said.

"My bronc must 'a' piled me," the wounded man murmured, his hand against his side. "I'm right bad hurt, seems like —all stove up inside. . . . The greasers are crowdin' us, boys. Look out!" Vaguely his mind was in the past. "Dark tonight, sure enough . . . but—right clost —to home." His feeble voice rang firmer. "I drew a black bean, boys. Suits me fine. So long. Well, I'm ready, you damned greasers."

Presently he tried to raise himself without success. He waved a weak arm. The old rebel yell quavered in his throat.

Ten minutes later he passed away.

EVE LOOKED up at Boone, frightened. She had never before been so close to death.

"Has he—gone?"

The Texan looked at her and nodded. Tears were rolling down her cheeks.

"Don't you feel bad," he said in a murmur. "He wouldn't 'a' had it different, not if he could have chosen for himself."

Turley looked at the old wrinkled face lying on the pillow and he was greatly moved.

"He died on my account—came to warn me what they were going to do."

The Texan smoothed back gently the scant gray hair. "He'd say it was all right, if he was alive to tell you. No kick comin' from him. He took his fighting chance, like any man has got to do. Maybe he knows how we feel."

"It's terrible," the girl sobbed. "They killed the poor old man, and he wouldn't have harmed any one."

The young man differed.

"No, it's not terrible. He had to die soon, an' this was the way it was comin' to him—the one way he would have wanted it to be. He wouldn't have asked a better break. You see, Miss, he was one of the old Lone Star State fightin' crowd, an' you can't say better than that of any one. You tell 'em in yore paper tomorrow, Mr. Turley, that he knew Travis an' Bowie an' Crockett an' fought with 'em. Tell 'em the story of the black bean."

The Adam's apple in Turley's throat shot up and down spasmodically.

"I'll do just that," he promised.

They moved toward the other room, the lamp in the editor's hand. The Mexican woman drew Turley to one side to discuss arrangements with him. The two went into the kitchen, leaving Boone and Eve together in the moonlit room.

The girl looked up at the young Texan, gifts of admiration and gratitude in her eyes.

"You saved my uncle's life," she cried.

"Sho! I didn't do any such a thing," he protested.

She was tremendously keyed up, lifted into an hysterical exaltation from terror and despair. Always dependent, always a creature of her emotions, she yielded now to natural impulse. Her slight body swayed forward. Her arms slipped around his neck. She clung to him, trembling like an aspen in the wind.

The door of the room opened. Doctor Peters walked in, followed by Tilatha McLennon and her brother.

Eve's arms relaxed and fell. She looked at Tilatha, defensively, as though she had been accused.

"Mr. Sibley saved us," she said slowly. "He—saved us from that awful mob." She broke down and began to sob.

"He's the greatest rescuer in the business," Tilatha answered, her voice hard and dry. "As a saver of ladies in distress he has no match. Isn't that true, Mr. Sibley?"

Boone had rehearsed several times what he would say to this girl when they met, how he would put into a dozen words his gratitude for what she had done for him. But her irony stung. It struck dead the friendliness in him. The last thing he wanted was to be a knight errant, a woman's man. His cold eyes met the hard glitter in hers.

"You do a little in the rescue line yore own self, don't you, Miss McLennon?" he drawled.

She flushed, angrily.

"I'm only an amateur beside you. Believe me, I'm quite through now I've squared accounts—if I have."

"Oh, with interest, Miss McLennon. I'm sure a heap obliged—"

She brushed his words aside, almost insultingly.

"Sheriff Brady came for the doctor. Perhaps it's more important for him to attend his patient than to listen to us make speeches."

Peters had moved to the bed the instant he came into the room. Now he spoke, very quietly.

"My patient is past needing me, Miss McLennon."

Tilatha turned to him with a startled exclamation. The flare of fierce challenge died out of her eyes.

CHAPTER XXV

BOONE GETS A JOB

ALIVE, Mobeetie Bill had been of no importance in the community, nothing but a garrulous old-timer who filled a chair on the sidewalk in front of the Dallas House and told cheerful reminiscences of the good old days. He had been a bullwhacker and a muleskinner, a buffalo hunter and a soldier. His life had been an adventurous one, but the younger generation often was in too much of a hurry to listen to his comments on the passing show as illustrated by experience.

Dead, he was for a day the most important figure in Tough Nut. The circumstances of his going might not have occasioned much discussion if Turley had not dramatized the event in the *Gold Pocket*.

Old Bill would have been much embarrassed if he could have read what was there said about him. He would have called it "guff." It would have seemed to him like boasting, even though another man had written the account.

There was a sketchy story of his life, pieced together from information dropped by him at various times. This followed the lead covering his death. On the editorial page was a black-bordered box, inclosing a tribute to him, headed "Mobeetie Bill Draws a Black Bean."

The editorial ran:

> We called him Mobeetie Bill because he came to us from the Panhandle. He was a Texan and proud of it. We never knew him by his real name, William Blake, until after his death. Nor did we know that in the days when Travis and Bowie and Crockett fought for the freedom of the Lone Star State they hailed him comrade. He lived an adventurous life, and as he lived he died. So he would have had it. Pioneer, soldier, buffalo hunter, freighter, he played always a man's part.
>
> Nearly fifty years ago William Blake rode with Ewan Cameron when his expedition crossed the border in pursuit of marauding thieves. The story of that unfortunate raid, filled with high lights of tragedy and heroism, deserves to rank in some ways with that of the Alamo. The invaders were captured and ordered flung into dungeons with the lowest criminals. They overcame their armed guard and escaped to the mountains. Some few reached the border, but most of them were recaptured after desperate resistance.
>
> General Santa Anna, in reprisal, ordered the Texans decimated. Their individual fate was determined by lottery. Each man drew a bean from a sack. If the bean was white, he lived; if it was black, he died.
>
> The story is that the Texans went to that fatal lottery as though it had been a game. They jested as they drew the beans that meant life and death. One of them, George Bibb Crittenden, later a Confederate general in our Civil War, gave the white bean he had drawn to a comrade who had wife and children, with the remark that since he was unmarried he could afford to take another chance. William Blake was fortunate enough to get one of the white beans that meant life. Years later he was freed from a Mexican dungeon.
>
> The last words of Mobeetie Bill were that he had drawn a black bean. He smiled when he said it. Never a man passed into the unknown with soul less troubled. God rest our gallant old friend. He died to help a girl and an unarmed man.

Tough Nut read the story and the editorial and the effect was immediate. Drunkards wept maudlin tears over their rum. Miners agreed that he sure was a good old donker and it was a damned shame. Women grew sentimental and busied themselves about the funeral. Citizens affirmed, not too loudly, that something ought to be done about the killing.

Almost everybody in town, with the exception of Curt French, attended the

funeral. The Quinns, their cousin Elder, Bob Hardy and Brad Prouty were there in a body. In an attempt to stem the tide of public opinion, Whip had announced that he would pay all expenses of the interment. This gesture cost him nothing, since Sibley, Peters and Turley, all present as pallbearers, had already settled with the undertaker.

Whatever the intentions of the Quinns might be as to Sibley these had temporarily to be postponed. It would not do just now to precipitate trouble. The town was in no mood to permit it.

"Right soon folks will be over this sentimental jag," Whip told his brother and French. "Then we'll talk turkey to this pilgrim."

"An' what if he talks turkey to us first?" Curt wanted to know, from the bed on which he lay. "They say Brady has done made him a deputy. What in Mexico does that mean if not trouble?"

Whip looked down at him blackly.

"There wouldn't have been any trouble if you an' Sing hadn't robbed the stage, or even then if you hadn't got drunk an' killed Buck. Or even then, if you hadn't bought that fool pendant for Faro Kate with the greenbacks. An' if that ain't enough you've got to get drunk again an' bump off old Mobeetie Bill instead of Sibley. By God, Curt, you sure wear yore welcome out amongst yore friends!"

"Don't pull yore picket pin, Whip, an' go to snortin'," answered French, scowling sulkily. "I had bad luck. I ain't denyin' it, am I?"

"You made yore own bad luck an' ours too. Now we've got to back yore fool plays an' bluff our way through. This last week you've done nothing but get us in bad. Right now we're mighty unpopular, an' you especial. It's got to stop, Curt, unless you want to go it alone without us."

"Was it me fixed up to tar an' feather Turley an' run him outa town?"

"No, but it was you got drunk an' killed old Bill," Whip answered curtly.

"I noticed none of you Quinns was on the job that night," French jeered. "Not a one of you."

"You needn't have been either. I told you to stay out of it an' let the crowd do the work for us, but no! you were hell bent on being in it. Consequence was, you kill Mobeetie Bill an' Sibley shows you up like a busted flush."

"Me! Me! Shows me up?" roared the bully. "Godamighty, Whip, you cain't talk thataway to me!"

Quinn's bleak eyes met the furious ones of the wounded man.

"What you mean I can't, Curt? I'm tellin' you what this whole town is sayin'. Make yore choice, an' make it quick. Do like I tell you from right damn' now or play a lone hand."

"Me afraid of that pilgrim, by God!"

"I didn't say that. I said that so far he'd taken every trick—an' he has. It'll be yore turn later—maybe. Question is, are you quittin' all this foolishness, or ain't you?"

"I'll sure make that bird climb a tree when my arm gets right," French bragged. "If any one thinks different—"

"Not the point right now, Curt. Answer my question. Are you gonna let me play the hand from now on? If you trail with our outfit you've got to take orders."

"Take orders. Where do you get that talk from, Whip? I never have took orders. I never will. Far as this stage holdup goes Sing is in deep as I am. Don't you forget that for a minute, Whip. If they hang it on me they're gonna hang it on him too. You can bet yore boots on that."

Whip looked at him with a steady unfathomable gaze. Something about it made the wounded man uncomfortable. Yet all Quinn said was, in a quiet low voice—

"Suits me if it does you, Curt."

"'Course I don't aim to make any trouble," French added by way of concession. "But if you try to make me the goat I'll squeal. See?"

"I see you don't," Quinn returned quietly.

The other man, meeting those cold black eyes, felt a chill run down his spine. He did not know, however, that he had just condemned himself to death.

WHAT French had said was true. After the funeral the sheriff had offered Boone a position as deputy and the Texan had accepted it.

"I'm gonna call for a showdown," Brady said. "We'll arrest Curt for killin' old Bill, then we'll spring it that he shot Buck Galway too. I want a deputy back of me who'll stay put."

"Have you figured how you're gonna arrest him without the Quinns takin' a hand?" Boone asked. "Don't forget their cousin, Sing, was in it. I'll say this for the Quinns, they're mighty good friends."

"My notion is to drive up to the Widow Slater's, where he's got a room, right after supper time. You'll stay outside with the buckboard an' I'll bring Mr. Curt out. Then we'll take a back street to the jail. It'll be kinda dark, anyhow."

"We may have to hogtie him if he's obstinate."

"That'll be up to him. If he acts up he'll get what any other ruffian would. I'm through kowtowin' to him an' his friends," the sheriff said.

It was growing dark when two men in a buckboard left the Buffalo Corral, drove up Howard Street, turned to the left at Pinon, and drew up in front of the Widow Slater's house. The taller one of the two waited outside, while the shorter one went into the front yard and knocked on the front door.

Mrs. Slater opened to the knock.

"Good evenin', ma'am," the visitor said. "I'm Sheriff Brady. Like to talk to Curt. No, you needn't tell him I'm here. I'll jest drap in on him. This room? Much obliged, ma'am."

French was playing, awkwardly and slowly, a one handed game of solitaire, using the bed quilt for a table. He looked up when the sheriff entered. His jaw dropped. He cursed as his left hand dived under the pillow.

The sheriff had him covered.

"Empty, Curt, empty. Bring yore hand out empty. I don't want to plug you . . . That's the idee."

"Whajawant?" the bad man growled, in one word.

"You, Curt. I'm arrestin' you for killin' old Bill."

"Had his gun out, hadn't he?"

"Not so I could notice it—till after you began to shoot."

"Well, he had—him an' that Sibley too."

"You'll get a chance to tell the judge that, Curt. Lucky you're dressed. We got a rig out front for you."

"I'm not gonna stand for that, Brady. You cain't get biggity with me. I've killed guys for less."

"That's why I'm arrestin' you. No use bellyachin', Curt. You're going with me."

French hesitated, then admitted defeat in a fury of anger.

"Onct I get out, Brady, I'll kill you on sight."

"You're not out yet. You're just going in. Here's yore hat."

Sullenly the killer moved to the door, passed into the other room, and out of the house. He drew back when he caught sight of the driver of the buckboard.

"So you're in this," he snarled. "It's a frame-up to gun me whilst you've got the deadwood on me."

"Get in that buckboard an' don't be a fool, Curt," the sheriff ordered. "You'll get a fair run for yore money an' that's a lot more than you'd give either one of us."

By back streets Boone drove the buckboard to the jail. Once French shouted to a man he knew—

"Tell Whip Quinn this damned sheriff slipped up whilst I was sleepin' an' is takin' me to jail."

Brady took his prisoner upstairs and locked him in a cell. All the time the vitriolic tongue of the bad man flung blistering epithets at him. The officer paid not the least attention. Presently he rejoined Sibley downstairs in the office.

"I reckon now we can begin to look for trouble," he said to his new deputy.

"Trouble on our trail, sure enough. Question is, what kind? I don't hardly think the Quinns are ripe for shootin' yet, not in public anyhow. Whip's too smart for that. He knows the town wouldn't like it, an' he's not ready to ride roughshod over public opinion. Not for a while, anyhow."

"My notion, too, but you never can tell. It'll be some kind of law move first, don't you reckon? Bly eats outa the Quinns' hands. He's the J. P."

"Maybeso."

"Onless Russ or Sing hear we've arrested Curt before Whip does. They're liable to come a-shootin', either one or both."

WITHIN the hour Whip Quinn and Bob Hardy, accompanied by Bly and Dugan of the express company, were in the office of the sheriff.

"What's this grandstand play, Brady?" demanded Whip harshly. "You know you can't make it stick?"

The officer ignored the curtness of Quinn's voice and manner.

"I'm sheriff, Whip. The boys elected me to enforce the law. I aim to do it. So I had to arrest Curt for killin' Mobeetie Bill. That's reasonable, ain't it?"

"Did you have to sneak up on him when he was alone an' asleep? Why not arrest him open an' aboveboard if it was a straight game?"

"I arrested him open enough, an' he wasn't asleep either."

For the first time since he had come into the room Whip let his black eyes rest on Boone.

"If you didn't aim this at us, Brady, whyfor did you get this Texas warrior to help you?"

"I know a good man when I see him, Whip."

"You know a man who is our enemy, an' you pick him for yore deputy—a man accused of murder an' robbery. What am I to think of that?" Beneath the heavy black brows Whip's dark sunken eyes blazed. The fingers of his left hand nursed the imperial below the tight thin lips. "You've always been against us, Brady. You're showin' yore hand now because you think we're in a jam."

"Nothin' to that, Whip," the sheriff denied. "Live an' let live. That's my motto. As to what you say about Sibley, he's been cleared of the stage holdup. If he's yore enemy I don't know it. I made him my deputy because he'll do to take along, if you want to know."

"Cleared by a coupla old desert rats you could buy for a pint of redeye," Whip flung back bitterly. "We've not come to the end of that road yet. What's yore play, Brady? Why are you standin' in with this Texas killer? That's the question folks are askin'."

Brady had been brought up on the fighting frontier. He was a quiet man, one who preferred always to sidestep trouble when he could. But he was no coward. Now anger burned in his face.

"They're askin' another question, Whip," he retorted hardily. "They're askin' where Curt French got the ten marked twenty dollar bills that fellow Lacy lost when the stage was robbed?"

Whip glared at him. For a moment an explosion seemed imminent. Then Dugan cut in suavely.

"One moment, gentlemen. Do you claim, Sheriff, that Curt French was one of the stage holdups?"

"I claim the evidence points to him."

Dugan had no more to say. He looked at Bob Hardy, a triumphant little smile twitching at his lips.

Hardy was a smaller man than the Quinns. He had come from a city of the middle West, and he lacked the brawn and sinew that an outdoor life had given his friends. But his skim-milk shallow eyes were cold and hard. Now he stepped forward and took the stage.

"I want Curt, Sheriff, for robbing the United States mail. This is a Federal case and it takes precedence of any claim you may have on him."

Brady stared at the deputy marshal, taken aback by the audacity of the demand. Yet he was not sure that he could deny the legality of Hardy's position. As a representative of the United States Government he had a right to take French in charge, very likely had a prior right to his own. He played for time.

"Kinda sudden this, Bob. But look at it thisaway. Murder is a more serious offense than robbin' the mails. Wouldn't that come first?" His perplexed doubt

was offered to the company at large, but his eyes turned to Sibley to learn what he thought of it.

"Looks so to me, but I'm no lawyer," Boone answered.

"Fellow, you're not in this," the marshal said to Sibley insolently. "Brady, use your head. The Government has a murder charge too. This holdup killed Buck Galway, didn't he? An' Buck was guarding the mails."

"Do you claim you're arrestin' French for that?" the sheriff asked skeptically.

"I'm arresting him because you say you've got evidence against him. Have you? Or are you fourflushing?"

"I have. Consid'rable of it."

"Then that's enough. I want my prisoner."

The sheriff looked down at the table as though he could gather wisdom from it. Doggedly he said—

"I got to have some kind of legal paper even if you're right."

Hardy handed to Brady a document demanding the body of French.

The county officer read it, still uncertain whether it was effective in law.

He grinned a little, to palliate the effect of his words.

"'Course you may be runnin' a shenanigan on me, Whip. Looks like you got the deadwood on me right now, if you got a right to serve this paper on me."

"Ask Bly," Whip said scornfully. "He drew it up, an' it's gonna stick."

"It'll stick if I'm convinced it's O. K." Brady said stoutly.

"Then I'd advise you to be convinced," Quinn flung back.

"Don't get on the prod, boys," the justice of the peace advised. "It's a perfectly good order of the court, Brady. You got no option but to honor it."

Again the sheriff looked toward his deputy, found no suggestion in Sibley's wooden countenance and decided to give way.

"All right, Bob. You can have him. Want to keep him in the jail here?"

"No, sir."

Brady looked at Boone.

"Bring him down, Sibley."

Five minutes later the small group of Quinn adherents went away jubilantly, French in their midst. The prisoner left some threats for the sheriff and his deputy to ponder over. He swore either to run them out of town or see them planted in Boot Hill.

Boone observed that Whip had not echoed any of his henchman's threats. In fact once he made caustic comment.

"That's plumb foolish talk, Curt. You're shootin' off yore mouth heap much when it's not needed."

Later Boone wondered why he had said it. Was Whip getting an alibi ready in case French went gunning again?

CHAPTER XXVI

TILATHA BLOWS HOT AND COLD

WITH a caution not in the least obvious Boone walked the streets of Tough Nut. His bearing, his strong stride, held the easy confidence of one at peace with the world. Yet he knew that at any moment a bullet might come whistling from door or window at him. French had been released on bond given by Whip Quinn and his man Bly, and he was breathing vengeance threats at every gambling house. Probably he would wait until his shooting arm was healed, but his impatience might outweigh his discretion. The man's vanity had been affronted. The Texan guessed that he would be simmering with rage until he had wiped the slate clean.

The Quinns, and their other adherents too, had to be reckoned with as enemies, though Boone did not expect any of them to pot him from ambush. They were too arrogant and self-confident for that. They would set the scene for a battle, take whatever odds they could, but they would fight in the open.

In front of Jefford's, Boone met the two old prospectors who had come to town to testify in his behalf. He stopped and shook hands.

"I haven't told you-all yet how much obliged I am for yore good word the other

night in front of Turley's place," he said.

"Hmp! Nothin' to that, fellow," snorted Hassayampa Pete. "You hadn't paid us yet for our time an' expense stickin' around town. If you'd got shot up we'd been out what-all is comin' to us."

"Y'betcha!" agreed his partner. "An' from what I can hear you ain't any too damn' good a risk now. Don't you reckon you better settle with us immediate before anything happens?"

Boone smiled. These gnarled old desert rats would hate to admit they had helped him out of friendliness.

"Suits me. What's the damage?"

"Oh well, we don't aim to break you," Pete said, and named a sum astonishingly low.

Boone paid it, thanked them and went on his way. They were good old scouts even though they harshly denied it.

At the post office Boone saw Tilatha McLennon. An underlying glow of carmine streamed into her cheeks. She knew this and it annoyed her. In answer to his greeting she bowed stiffly.

Boone got his mail and returned to the doorway. He ripped open a letter from his mother, but his eyes followed the figure that moved down the street with such light grace and supple movement. She walked as though she loved the air and the sunshine, as though she were kin to all wild free things.

He put the letter back in his pocket, stepped out and presently was beside her. She turned, a hard lively light in the eyes beneath the finely arched brows.

"Like to say a few words to you, Miss McLennon," he said, lifting his wide hat.

"There's nothing preventing you, is there?"

Unfortunately, he smiled. She was so uncompromisingly hostile. At once he knew that smile had been a mistake. The stab of her eyes, which had in them little tawny flecks matching the hair of lustrous copper, dared him to be amused at her. He did not say at once what he had come to say. Instead he asked her a question.

"Why do you hate me so?"

"Hate you? I don't hate you. But it's just like you to flatter yoreself that I do. You're so—so important, aren't you?" She flung it at him insultingly, with a flare of feminine ferocity.

Her manner puzzled him. He did not see any justification for it. Why did she always clash with him whenever they came together?

"Am I?" He smiled again. For the life of him he couldn't help it. She was so direct and uncompromising.

"I suppose you think—because people talk about you—that you're a great man an' can strut around—"

"So I strut too, do I?" He strangled a desire to shout with laughter.

She understood his reaction and it irritated her the more, drove her on to a further exhibition of temper that later she would lash herself for.

"You're hateful," she told him.

"I see. I'm hateful, but you don't hate me," he drawled.

Two defiant stars flashed at him.

"I never knew a man so—so—"

She stopped, for sheer inadequacy of expression.

"All right, Miss McLennon, I'm conceited an' I strut an' I'm hateful. We'll let it go at that, unless you'd like to free yore mind real thorough. But I'm not ungrateful. I haven't had a chance yet to thank you for what you did for me at Galeyville. I'm thankin' you now. Hadn't been for you I'd never have reached the roof in time, an' if I had I'd never have made a getaway without yore pony."

Under the direct look of his steady gray eyes she felt her blood flutter. Somehow he had disarmed her anger at once.

"Billy got back," she said irrelevantly, not knowing what else to say.

"I never saw the like of it—you comin' across the roofs to pull me outa the tightest hole I was ever in. Twice I'd told you I didn't want yore help. But I took it, an' mighty glad to get it. So no matter how hateful I am you'll know that once I wasn't struttin'."

This time she did not mind his smile. She liked it. There was something warm

and winning in it that went straight to her hammering heart. This cold, hard man had never offered her friendship before, if he was really offering that now.

Her eyes fell.

"I don't think you're hateful always," she said.

"That's something," he laughed. "Anyhow, I got it said, what I been wantin' to tell you."

"There's something I wanted to tell you, that first night we met, but I didn't say it. You wouldn't let me, at least I thought you wouldn't. It hurt my feelings because you acted as though it didn't much matter whether you had rescued me or not. An' first thing I knew I was mad at you."

"There seems 'most always to be a breeze when you an' I are in the same neighborhood," he commented.

"I don't know how to say 'Thank you' nice the way some girls do. I'm too independent, maybe."

"You're criticisin', Miss McLennon; I'm not."

"An' I fly off the handle so. I've always had my own way too much, I reckon."

He had nothing to say about that. Tilatha took his silence as condemnation.

"If I were like Eve Turley, so sweet an' pretty an' gentle—"

"Why then you wouldn't be Tilatha McLennon," he finished for her.

Again she felt that he was judging her. She thought of Eve, inheritor of all the graces that make women dear to men. Before her flashed a picture of her in Boone Sibley's arms. Of course he would love a girl like that. How could he help it, or any man on whom she turned those soft appealing eyes? Jealousy flamed up in her like lighted tow.

"Anyhow you wouldn't want me to be grateful her way," she said, and could have bit her tongue out a moment later.

"No, I wouldn't," he said promptly. His thought was, neither her nor Eve nor any other woman.

Naturally she misunderstood.

"Don't worry. I'll not trespass on her privileges. Am I to congratulate you yet?"

He looked at her.

"You sure take the cake, Miss McLennon."

"For bad temper, I suppose you mean."

"Take it any way you like it," he replied coldly.

They had walked to the end of a side street that looked down into the valley and across to the mountains beyond. He lifted his hat and turned to go.

Out of the last house on the street came Russ Quinn. He stopped in his stride to stare at them, in the middle of the road, directly in the path of Boone. There was in his attitude the menace of a hesitation that might in an instant leap to action.

Boone moved forward evenly, eyes fixed on the face of his foe.

"Russ," the girl cried in warning.

Already Quinn had read the meaning of the girl's stormy face. They had been quarreling, these two. He moved aside and swept his hat off in a bow to the Texan.

"Not yet, Mr. Sibley," he jeered. "It'll be some other day for you an' me."

"You'll find me waitin' at the gate, sir," Boone said quietly.

"Any time, any place, Texas warrior."

Boone did not look back, but he knew Russ Quinn had joined Tilatha.

CHAPTER XXVII

EXIT A BAD CITIZEN

SHERIFF BRADY took the stage and train to Tucson. Casually he mentioned at the Last Chance that he was going to run down a tip he had been given as to the whereabouts of a horsethief wanted in Cochise. His real purpose was to consult a lawyer in whom he had confidence as to his status in the Curt French case. It would be strange, he thought, if the law was so written that a man could walk the streets undisturbed with two separate murder charges hanging over his head.

The sheriff was back in Tough Nut next

day, his mind made up as to what he could and could not do.

"Matlock says if Curt is free we can arrest him," Brady told Boone. "If the Government wants to sit in, it will have to bring charges against him in the proper legal way. Bob Hardy hasn't done that. He don't aim to put any charges on record at all. Well, we'll arrest Curt again an' make the Quinns show their hand. They'll have to put chips in the pot if they want to draw cards."

"Sounds reasonable."

"Anything happen while I was away?"

"Not much. Quiet all along the Potomac. Oh, one little thing, which may or may not be important. Sing Elder had words with Curt French at the Occidental. Don't know what the row was about."

"You can guess, can't you?"

"If I was guessin', I'd say Sing was some sore at Curt for ballin' up that little business they were on the other day. I'll lay a two bit bet with you, Sheriff. Curt ain't going to lie down in brotherly love with the Quinns much longer."

"No takers present. Now about this arrest. The sooner the quicker. Why not now?"

"You're boss of this round-up, Sheriff. Now it is."

They made what preparations were necessary and started on their way.

"He'd ought to be gettin' around to the gambling houses about this time of night," Brady said.

They did not find him at Dolan's Palace, but Boone saw there a man he had met in the hills, Tom Tracy. His arm was in a sling from the wound he had received during the attack on the Mexicans.

"How's Dusty Rhodes gettin' along?" the Texan asked him.

"I'm not keepin' cases on Dusty," the man answered sourly. "Ask Til McLennon if you're anxious to know. I hear she nursed him real tender."

"Better look cheerful when you talk about Miss McLennon," Boone advised him coldly. "Some of her friends might misunderstand yore manner."

"Do you claim to be one of them?" Tracy asked insolently. "She has some right ornery ones."

"We'll not discuss Miss McLennon here, Tracy."

The cowboy looked at him and started to say something, then changed his mind. He wanted to be ugly, but the steely eyes daunted him. This Sibley was no kind of pilgrim to work off his temper on. Moreover, at that precise moment he heard the sheriff put a question to the bartender. Brady wanted to know, in a low voice, if Curt French had been around that evening.

Tracy glanced at the sheriff and back at the deputy, murmured an indistinct defiance and withdrew from talk. A moment later he departed by the back door.

"That fellow Tracy has gone to warn French we're out after him, looks to me," Boone said to his chief as the cowboy slipped out. "We better get right busy."

They tried Jefford's and the Last Chance. French had not been in either place.

"Liable to be at home yet," one faro dealer said to Boone, a gleam of malice in his eye. "He don't get around so much since—since his accident."

The officers walked to the house where French roomed.

"Better wait here an' get him as he comes out," the sheriff decided. "He won't be surprised in his room a second time."

Boone did not answer. He was listening. Voices from within the house came to them, harsh menacing voices. A shot rang out, two more almost together, then a fourth. There came the sound of running feet—and silence. For a moment they could see shadowy figures vanishing into the darkness.

"Went out the back door, whoever they were," the sheriff said.

"In a sure enough hurry too. Not waitin' for the neighbors to gather."

Brady drew his Colt .45 and trod softly toward the house.

"Won't need that, I reckon," Boone said in his ear. "Still, might as well play it safe."

"You figure he's gone," the sheriff whispered.

The Texan looked at him, queerly.

"Yes, gone."

"If Tracy was here to warn him, what was the shootin' about?"

"Tracy wasn't here."

Boone tried the front door, turned the knob gently and tiptoed in. From under the door of the bad man's bedroom came a gleam of lamplight. The officers moved gingerly across the floor. One of the boards squeaked. Brady motioned to his deputy to give him right of way. The sheriff felt for the latch, raised it slowly and flung the door open.

He stood in the doorway, crouched, wary, revolver in hand.

"We've got you, French. Don't—"

The words died in his mouth.

Boone looked over his shoulder. A man lay face down, half on the bed and half on the floor. The fingers of the left hand still clutched a six-shooter. His legs were sprawled out awkwardly. The bandaged right arm hung lax. In the supine body was no sign of life.

Neither of the officers needed to turn over the bearded face to know that this was Curt French.

"They got him right," Brady said.

Boone examined the weapon.

"He fired once. A bullet struck the floor over there, probably his, after he was hit likely . . . See, they hit him three times—here an' here an' once in the throat."

The sheriff agreed.

"The last shot after he was down. They intended to make sure."

"They were thorough. Figured that a dead man couldn't do 'em any more harm an' that a live one might upset their apple cart."

"The Quinns did it, you think?"

"Heard from Tracy we were gonna arrest French an' beat us to it. Maybe they didn't intend to kill him, only to make sure he'd keep still, but when he acted ugly they let him have it. You can't tell. Might have been that way."

"Which of the Quinns?"

"When we find out which ones Tracy met when he reached the Occidental—"

"How do you know he went to the Occidental?"

"He'd head straight for there, wouldn't he? Since he scooted up the alley he wouldn't meet any of 'em before he reached there, chances are."

"It had got to where the Quinns had to kill him, you figure."

"Don't it look thataway? Maybe not the Quinns, but some of their friends. He got 'em into this jam—first by gettin' drunk an' killin' Buck Galway, next by buying the jewelry with the marked bills, then by shootin' Mobeetie Bill. He'd gone wild. They couldn't control him any longer an' they didn't know what he would do or say. They had to get rid of him or light out themselves. Naturally they bumped him off."

"Well, he was a bad citizen. He was after yore scalp an' mine. I won't mourn him any."

"Nor I. He was a killer of the worst kind—irresponsible. He killed when there wasn't any need of it. You could never tell when he would break loose. I expect he would have got me if the Quinns hadn't held him back."

"He died with a gun in his hand. We can't prove he didn't fire the first shot."

"No. I don't reckon he did, but we can't prove it."

For some moments they had heard voices outside. Now some one called to them, asking what the trouble was.

The sheriff went to the door.

"You can come in, boys, far as the inner room. Curt French has been killed by parties unknown. Don't come any closer. I want the coroner to look things over first."

The men in the doorway stared at the figure lying on the edge of the bed.

"Who killed him?" some one asked presently.

"Yore guess is as good as ours, Hartley," the sheriff answered. "We found him dead when we got here. We had come to arrest him."

"Mrs. Slater had gone to prayer meetin'. She always does Wednesday evenings," a neighbor contributed.

"Too bad she wasn't here. She would have known who was with Curt," Brady said.

One man rubbed his chin and sidled a look at him, another at Boone. There was suspicion in those furtive glances.

"Don'cha reckon they chose a time when they knew she'd be out?" he asked.

"Don't know a thing about that. Hartley, would you mind bringin' Meade up?" Meade was coroner and undertaker. "Now I'll have to ask you boys to get out for a while."

"Just a moment, Hartley," demurred Boone in his low even voice. "Might as well take a look at our guns before you go—the sheriff's an' mine."

Brady looked at him, surprised. He had not caught, as the Texan had, those looks of veiled suspicion.

"What for?" he asked bluntly.

"Some folks might claim we did it, Sheriff, as the easiest way to get rid of him. Better set all minds at rest about that right now."

Boone handed his revolver to Hartley. The man examined it. The hammer rested on an unloaded chamber. The other five held cartridges.

"Not been fired recently," Hartley reported, showing the six-shooter to the others present.

The weapon of the sheriff was passed from one to another.

"Now make sure we're not carryin' any other concealed guns," Boone said.

Hartley patted the bodies of both the sheriff and the deputy.

"Curt had been makin' his threats everywhere what all he was aimin' to do to both of you," some one said. "If you'd killed him any jury would have said self-defense an' there wouldn't have been any complaints from decent citizens."

"Only we didn't kill him," Boone replied. "That's the point we're makin' clear."

"Who did, d'you reckon?" blurted out a little fat man, one whose curiosity and instinct for gossip outran discretion.

The sheriff, face immobile, eyes cold and blank, looked at him.

"You tell us, Simmons," he suggested.

CHAPTER XXVIII

TOM TRACY WALKS AND TALKS

TOM TRACY stepped out from the Bohemian Theater and turned his steps down Apache street. It was nothing to him that the sky was full of stars and that a lovers' moon rode the heavens, that a faint breath of wind carried with it the low murmur of pines. What he wanted to hear was the rattle of poker chips, what he wanted to see was an ace full pinched closely in his hands.

Light swift footsteps sounded behind him. A voice drawled in his ear:

"Evenin', Mr. Tracy. Walk with you if you don't mind."

Tracy's hangdog look took in Boone Sibley.

"I'm particular who I walk with," he blustered.

The Texan laughed.

"So am I—sometimes, an' since we're both—"

"I'm not lookin' for yore company, sir."

"Well, I'm lookin' for yores," Boone told him.

The cowboy stopped.

"Meanin' what?"

"Like to have a few moments' conversation with you at the sheriff's office."

"You arrestin' me? What for?"

"I didn't say so. Want to ask some questions."

"Ask 'em here," Tracy said belligerently.

"I mentioned the sheriff's office."

"You got another mention comin', fellow. I ain't going there. You got no right to take me."

"I reckon I have. Anyhow, that's the way it'll be."

Stormily Tracy glared at him. Surges of rage swept him but did not reach the

point of explosion. There was something about this long Texan that daunted him. He dared not call for a showdown.

"You can't take me without a warrant," he protested.

"Turn to the left here," Boone said in an even matter of fact voice that had compulsion back of it.

Tracy hesitated, then with an oath did as directed.

The sheriff was reading the evening paper in his office. He took his feet down from the desk and nodded amiably at Tracy.

"'Lo, Tom. How's yore arm comin'?"

"Bring me here to ask me that?" growled the cowboy.

"Other things, too." The sheriff put his arms on the desk, leaned forward and looked hard at the cowboy. "After you left Dolan's a while ago an' went to the Occidental you met Sing Elder an' Brad Prouty. The three of you went outside together. Where did you go?"

"Say, what's it to you, Brady?" bristled the hill man. "Do we have to ask you where all we can go?"

"We know what you told 'em. That's not important. Point is, where did you leave 'em an' when?"

"I ain't said I was with 'em a-tall. None of yore business whether I was or wasn't. I choose my own friends, Mr. Sheriff."

Brady nodded, to himself apparently, as though this confirmed something he had in mind.

"We'll lock this fellow up in a cell, Sibley."

"What for?" demanded the cowboy.

"For the murder of Curt French."

Tracy's jaw dropped. He stared at Brady, eyes wide with astonishment.

"Curt French—dead?" he got out incredulously.

"Where have you been the last hour an' a half, Tom?" the sheriff asked.

"Why I been in a box at the Bohemian, drinkin' beer with one of the house girls."

Boone said:

"All O. K. I've checked up on that."

"When did you get to the Bohemian?" the sheriff asked Tracy.

"I dunno exactly. Right after I left Sing an' Brad."

"An' where was that?"

The cowboy grew cautious. He had not meant to make that admission, though he did not know what the sheriff was after. It had been surprised out of him by the impact on his mind of stunning news, that French had been killed and he was charged with the crime.

"What you drivin' at, Brady? Do you claim I killed Curt French—if he's dead?"

"The story has been on the streets an hour, Tom. It certainly reached the Bohemian. Funny you hadn't heard it."

"Tell you I was alone in a box with a girl watchin' the show. How would I hear it?"

"You didn't help kill him then? Didn't know he was gonna be killed?"

"No, sir," Tracy protested, little beads of sweat on his forehead.

"If that's so, all you can get is a penitentiary sentence for concealin' facts and helpin' the murderers escape."

"Me. Why, I got no notion who they are. Didn't know Curt was dead till you told me two minutes ago. I ain't gonna be drug into this, Sheriff."

"Come clean, Tracy," urged Boone. "When did you leave Sing Elder an' Brad Prouty?"

The cowboy gulped. He would have liked to talk with his friends before he did any explaining. As it stood now, he was quite in the dark. One thing he knew! He had no intention of being dragged into this killing when he had had nothing to do with it.

"What's the idea, Brady? Are you claimin' Sing an' Brad did this? That's a fool notion. Ain't they all good friends? Don't they all run together?"

"We're askin' the questions, Tom. You don't have to answer them if you don't like. You can stand yore fightin' chance of acquittal at the trial."

"Trial!" the cowboy repeated, his voice raised. "Hell's hinges, you can't try me for something I didn't do! Send

for Whip Quinn. I want to talk to him."

Brady shook his head.

"No, Tom, you're going into a cell, an' you'll do no talkin' to any one—not yet. We'll find out what we want to know without yore help. Don't blame us later when you're in a jam. You've had yore chance to talk."

"I left 'em right outside the Occidental," Tracy blurted out.

"Right away?"

"When you told them we were lookin' for Curt French what did they say?" asked Boone.

"Why, I dunno. I don't recollect hardly what they said." The cowboy's manner was sullen and reluctant.

"Said they were going to warn Curt, didn't they?"

"Maybeso."

"They did or they didn't. Which?"

"Why, yes, I guess they did."

For half an hour they grilled the harassed man. They got out of him all he knew, which was not very much. Then, in the presence of Hank Jacobs the jailer, Tracy signed a statement covering the facts.

"Can I go now?" he asked.

"Sorry, Tom, but we'll have to hold you for the present," Brady said after a low voiced consultation with Boone. "Don't worry. I reckon you're not in this."

"If I ain't in it, why can't I go?"

Brady did not tell him the real reason, which was that he would run at once to Whip Quinn with the story of what had occurred. Indignant and ill at ease, Tracy found himself locked in a cell for the night. It was, he felt, a high handed outrage. He would sure tell Whip and have him bring these fellows to account.

CHAPTER XXIX

TWO MEN

HUGH McLENNON had gone back to the ranch, but his sister stayed in town as a guest of Eve Turley. Tilatha did not herself quite know why she was remaining. There were several factors contributing to her last minute decision. One was the friendship which had sprung up between her and Eve. Brought up in a world of men, of rough, hard riding cowboys almost as simple and elemental as the longhorns they drove, she had taken on the color of her environment. There was a hard metallic quality about her. She looked at facts without any of the indirection of her sex. Watching Eve, she realized that there was something she had missed, the soft and sheltered life that stresses femininity.

Always, vaguely, this clean, brown, fearless girl from the hills had known dissatisfaction with her primitive existence. She loved the mountains. It was a joy to her to be in a saddle, riding the windswept hills. But she had wanted friends of her own sex—not the gaunt tight-lipped wives of ranchmen, women who had been buffeted by the hardships of pioneering—but young girls full of laughter and whispered secrets, such as Eve Turley.

This gold and ivory Eve charmed her. There was a provocative unexpected quality about the girl. She could grow so enthusiastic about dress, so starry eyed over the color of a ribbon, that Tilatha envied her. She bubbled with mirth regarding the young men she met, and mocked them to their faces so prettily that they came back for more.

Tilatha could not bring herself to go home yet because she felt too that the struggle in which Boone Sibley had become the central figure was moving to a swift and tragic climax. No longer did she deny to herself that he held her heart in that strong brown hand of his. He could crush it if he wished. Hourly he walked his lightfooted way in great danger. Soon now the blow would fall, and when it struck him down she too would be stricken. She would of course go on living, but she would carry always in her bosom the dull ache that is close to despair.

The news of the death of Curt French came to her at first as a shock of relief.

He had spread his threats broadcast. Now he was powerless to execute them. One great danger no longer confronted the man she loved.

She wondered how French had come to his death. There was some mystery about it. Apparently the sheriff and his deputy had cleared themselves, though there had reached her rumors that they knew more than they were telling. Logically, as far as she could see, they were the men who benefited most from his death. Perhaps they had tried to arrest him and had been forced to shoot when he resisted.

With Eve she called on her dressmaker for a fitting, the morning after the bad man had been killed. They met Russ Quinn in front of Blum's photograph gallery.

At sight of Tilatha the man's dark eyes lighted. He had supposed she had left town with her brother.

"Glad to meet up with you," he told her. "Thought you'd gone home."

Miss McLennon rescued her hand and reminded him that there was another young woman present.

"You're glad to meet Miss Turley too, aren't you?" she suggested.

He smiled at the little blond girl.

"I reckon Miss Turley can understand when I say that there isn't any other lady present for me when I meet Til McLennon."

Eve clapped her hands.

"Bravo! That's the nicest compliment I've heard since I came to Tough Nut." She nodded her head in vigorous approval. "And when I look at her I know why you feel that way."

"Happy to have yore endorsement, Miss Turley."

Her shy eyes flashed at him an audacious challenge.

"I'm endorsing the sentiment, Mr. Quinn."

"I see, an' not the sentimenter." His bold eyes, reflecting careless amusement, met her gaze coolly. "Couldn't you go a little farther, Miss? So's not to leave me quite heartbroke."

"No, sir." She shook her fair curls vivaciously. "Not the leastest mite. You're too wild and woolly for me."

"No hope for me a-tall. Have I got to start pinin' right off?" he derided.

"You'll have to ask Tillie that," she said wickedly.

Tilatha changed the subject. She did not want to discuss even in badinage Russ Quinn's feeling for her. He was out of the running, definitely, finally. She did not understand now how she could ever have considered him as a husband. From that point of view Boone Sibley filled her horizon.

"Have you heard anything more about Curt French—who killed him, I mean?" she asked.

The muscles in his dark face tightened.

"I don't need to know any more. Sibley an' Brady killed him."

"But they showed their revolvers to everybody in the room. They hadn't been fired."

"What leads you to think this Texas warrior ain't a two-gun man?" he demanded. "Brady, too, for that matter."

"They were searched by Mr. Hartley."

Quinn laughed, unpleasantly.

"So they were, after they had got rid of their second guns. That's an old dodge. An' tell me why this Texas man mentioned lookin' at his gun if he wasn't fixin' up an alibi."

"He knew he would be accused, since Curt French had been threatening him an' Mr. Brady. They did not leave the house. What became of the other guns if they had two each?"

"Gimme a harder one," Quinn returned scornfully. "Why, they shoved 'em in a bureau—or under the bed—or beneath the mattress—till they shooed the crowd out. I notice they wouldn't let the boys come into the room an' look around."

"They couldn't do that till the coroner had seen the body," Tilatha protested. "You're unfair to them, Russ. You twist around everything they did."

"Bet yore boots they couldn't, not without some one finding the six-shooters. So they didn't take any chances. They

herded the crowd out an' fixed things to suit themselves."

"I don't believe it, not for a minute. Why should they? Curt French had threatened them both, repeatedly. If he resisted arrest they had a perfect right—"

"An' if he didn't resist arrest? If he never got a chance to resist?"

Tilatha flung up her head and looked straight at him.

"That wasn't the way of it. They're not that kind of men, either of 'em."

His black eyes narrowed.

"You mean Sibley ain't that kind of a man," he challenged.

"I said both of 'em. I say it again. Why do you stick up for Curt French when you know what he was, Russ Quinn?" she asked indignantly.

"I know what this Sibley is too. Up to date he's sure had a lot of luck. First that business of Buck Galway an' the stage coach robbery, then Jim Barkalow—"

"Jim Barkalow isn't dead, an' he isn't going to die."

"Then Curt French."

"That's not proved."

"If he gets by with that too he's certainly a good one. Listen, girl. He's struck twelve o'clock. He's through."

"I should think you'd be ashamed to mention Jim Barkalow—fifty of you against one."

"Against two," he corrected darkly. "I've not forgot that."

There had been the sound of footsteps clicking down the walk. Now Eve let out a little "Oh!" of dramatic alarm. Boone Sibley was striding directly toward them.

At the same moment Tilatha and Russ Quinn looked up and became aware of his approach.

THE SHOTGUN messenger spoke first, his voice harsh and insolent.

"I've been tellin' Til McLennon that you an' Brady murdered Curt French," he called out.

Tilatha noticed for the first time how like a bird of prey this black Quinn was. He had the rapacious nose and the glittering eyes of a hawk. He seemed, at this instant, about to swoop down on his victim.

The eyes of the men actually seemed to clash, so hard and steely was the meeting of them.

"Then you've been tellin' her what's not true," the Texan countered. "An' I reckon you know it."

"Meanin' what, Sibley?" asked Russ, his body dangerously tense and motionless. "That I'm a liar?"

"Meanin' that we've got the killers locked up in jail."

Quinn forgot, in his astonishment, the anger that had been simmering to the boiling point.

"Got 'em locked up! Who?"

"The men who killed Curt French. You notice I choose my words, Quinn. I don't know whether they murdered him or not."

"I asked you who you're talkin' about."

"So you did. Sing Elder and Brad Prouty."

"You've got 'em in yore jail—Sing an' Brad?" the express messenger demanded.

"Yes."

Quinn was amazed. He could hardly believe it. Yet he knew it was true if the Texan said so.

"How come they there? Who took 'em?"

"I did."

"When?"

"This mornin'. Half an hour ago."

"An' they didn't shoot you full of holes—either one of 'em?"

"Not so I noticed it. They were right sensible an' peaceable, once they had time to think it over."

"By God, I don't believe it!"

"That's yore privilege, Mr. Quinn."

Russ glared at his enemy, savagely. He wanted to break loose now and have it over with. He had no fear. He was game and hardy and self-reliant. If he reached for his six-shooter he or this Texan whom he hated would be dead within a few seconds. But something held his hand. Was it the presence of the women? Was it his wish to consult Whip before he struck? He never knew.

Abruptly he turned on his heel and strode away.

Eve, white to the lips, stared at Boone. "I thought—I thought—"

She did not finish the sentence. Tilatha knew what she meant, for she had desperately feared the same thing—that he would strike here, regardless of them. Her imagination had heard the roar of guns, had seen the flash of fire, had felt the stab of bullets. She leaned sickly against an adobe wall, limbs and body lax. For the first time in her life she felt as though she were going to faint.

Boone looked at Tilatha. What he saw in her face made his voice gentle.

"It's all right," he told her.

"It's all wrong," she cried, brokenly. "He nearly—"

"He was some annoyed," the man told her. "Can't blame him for being disturbed at bad news."

"Did they do it—Sing Elder an' Brad Prouty?" Tilatha asked. Her impulse was to divert him from her agitation.

"We think so. Looks thataway. A woman saw them going into the house where French roomed. That was five minutes before the shootin' began."

"But why should they kill him? He was one of their crowd, wasn't he?"

"Yes, but he was runnin' wild on them. They couldn't trust him, the way I figure it out. They had just got news that the sheriff was lookin' for French to arrest him again. Sing was in the stage holdup with him. We know Sing had had trouble with the fellow at the Occidental. I'd guess French was makin' threats to spill the beans if he couldn't have things his way.

"Prouty an' Elder are thick as thieves. Maybe they called on French to make sure he'd keep his mouth shut, an' a quarrel flared up. We can't prove they went to kill him nor that they fired the first shot. We do know the only shot French fired went wild, as it might have done if he was badly wounded when he pulled the trigger. But there's an answer to that guess. He was using his left hand an' wasn't used to handling his six-shooter so."

"An' might have been trying to beat them to the draw," the hill girl added.

"Just that, an' in his hurry turned loose before he was ready."

"But if you think that, why arrest them an' make them an' the Quinns mad?"

"I didn't say I thought so. I said it might be like that. It's up to Elder an' Prouty to show self-defense if they can."

Tilatha shook her head.

"I don't see why you couldn't let 'em alone. They can't be convicted. You know that. Why make trouble for yoreself?"

"We're law officers, Brady an' I. We've made up our minds to clean up this town if we can. What kind of sheriffs would we be to let these fellows get away with this an' never even call for a showdown?"

"You don't have to go lookin' for trouble, do you?"

"We have to meet it when it looks for us. No use beatin' about the bush, Miss McLennon. We've served notice to the Quinn outfit that law has come to this town to stay."

"But suppose they—shoot you or something?" Eve asked, eyes wide with the thrilling horror of this drama.

Boone smiled at her naive question. He thought it very probable they would, but not if he could prevent it.

"Yore uncle kept on writin' pieces in the *Gold Pocket* about conditions here even after one of 'em had shot him," he reminded her. "Some one has got to stand pat if ruffians aren't going to rule the roost."

THE THREE of them had turned and were walking back to the Turley house.

"Tell me how you captured them," Tilatha said. "They're so—so lawless, both of 'em."

"Got the drop on both. I knew they were up till two-three o'clock at the Occidental an' would sleep late. So I dropped in an' waked 'em. Sing hadn't even bolted his door. He hadn't a chance to

resist. The other fellow, Prouty, came an' opened the door when I called. I gave the name of yore friend Russ Quinn to him. He was sleepy an' yawnin', so I had him too. For a moment he had notions, but he changed his mind an' saw reason."

Tilatha made a little gesture of impatient despair.

"If it would do any good, but they'll be out again soon walkin' the streets an' lookin' for you. Don't you know that? But of course you do."

"I know too that there's a change in the sentiment of this town," he told her. "Most folks here always were honest an' law abiding, but they didn't dare protest. Turley played almost a lone hand. Now it's different. Men meet me on the street an' wish more power to us. The time has passed when the Quinns can run the town by high handed methods."

"The time hasn't passed when they can shoot you down in the streets," Tilatha replied. "What's the use of saying that law is here when it is no such thing?"

"It's on the way. Don't you worry, Miss McLennon. The day of the Quinns is pretty near past, an' nobody knows it better than Whip Quinn. He won't give up without a fight. But he's fixed so he loses if he wins. Say he wipes me an' Brady out. Public opinion—"

She stopped and looked at him. He noticed for the first time the tawny flecks in the big brown eyes.

"Will public opinion bring you back to life after they have killed you?" she flung fiercely at him.

He was surprised at the passion in her voice. No reason was apparent to him for so much ferocity. The thing he was doing was only what had to be done. Even she must realize that, untamed and wilful though she was.

"They haven't killed me yet," he told her grimly.

"No, but they will. Why do you come here an' mix up in this? It's not yore fight, but you hadn't got clear into town with yore mule team before you had started it."

"Struttin' around, I reckon," he murmured with a smile. "Me thinkin' myself a big man an' wantin' folks to talk about me."

She brushed aside his drawling quotation of her frank appraisal of him made at their latest meeting.

"How you can stand there an' joke about it when you know, just as well as I do, that—" The hill girl broke off her sentence. Unexpectedly her throat had filled with a sob.

Boone looked at her in swift surprise. He saw the stormy rise and fall of her bosom. A flag of color fluttered in her cheeks. Tilatha bit her lip, turned and walked swiftly into the house. His amazed gaze followed her.

Eve looked at him, imps of mischief dancing in her blue eyes.

"Mr. Sibley, would you like me to tell you something—real important?"

He shrugged broad shoulders.

"I'm listenin'."

"Do you know what a duffer is?"

"A duffer! Why, a fellow who—who—"

"Exactly. Well, you're one."

And with that she turned and went flying into the house.

TO BE CONTINUED

F. R. BUCKLEY *tells*

Of a New Life

A ruthless nobleman who once so far forgot himself as to do a noble deed

TO Andrea the Blond, called a pastry cook in the service of his Grace the Duke of Venieto at his palace in the capital, these:

Young man—

BE NOT alarmed that a stranger should write to thee thus, which is to say, at some length; nor that the said stranger, whose name may not be entirely unfamiliar to thee, should display knowledge of thy true function in the household of his Grace.

I have just parted from one Roberto Falducci, an old campaigner friend come to visit me in my retirement; who boasted (not knowing to whom he spoke) of having first disobliged his Highness, and then of having met thee in a dark street and come away with his life. Nay, more; he said that, had he not been drunk and accordingly full of the Christian virtues he would certes have come away with thine; since, having missed thy first stroke, thou didst incontinently drop thy dagger when he turned on thee, and pleaded for mercy on the ground that thou wert about to marry and begin a new life.

My son, my son, what is this? For I may explain, now as well as later, that thou art my son; at least according to what I was told. My name (to save thee turning pages, and thus losing the thread of this paternal exhortation) is Luigi Caradosso; I was formerly captain of the guard to a Duke of Venieto; and if thou art indeed the young man I have in mind, thy mother hath a mole on the left side of her neck, about two fingers-breadths below the ear. It is a regret that her name escapes me, save that it began with M; a sensible woman, with no gullet for lies, on whose account I am the more astonied at thy behavior, Andrea.

Circumstances have given thee a trade; thou art a bravo. It might be wished, in theory and by those with no need for thy services and no care for thy welfare, that thou wert a priest; but in fact thou art not, and it is with facts that we must deal.

And the fact (at least as related by Roberto) would seem to be that, a sinner by trade, thou art endeavoring to improve thyself by becoming virtuous! Alas! Even had thou not calf-bawled thine intention to marry, I should have seen the form of Woman in this madness of thine; no man ever went so mad without feminine aid. And, perceiving the said form, I know that against it neither my fatherly authority, which I now exert for the first time in my life, nor my seventy

years of experience of this world, nor anything I may say, will much avail.

Thou wilt admit that for a good man to dabble in sin is disaster; but to the question of what shall happen to the bad man that toys with virtue, thou wilt reply that she hath dove's eyes.

If there were one peasant in this village of my exile capable of discussing aught but vines and their maladies, I would leave thee to thy fate.

As it is, I will bear with thee. Finding the front of thine understanding too strong for attack, I will endeavor to turn its flank with a parable.

The next day

UNLIKE most parables, however (a squadron of horse passing through interrupted me, but it hath gone now) this is a true tale; I witnessed with mine own eyes the things which it relates, being at that time captain of bandits—to call them guards would be a mockery—for Fedirigo di Tonduzzi, the Count of the Narrow Pass. I may explain now—and this explanation may serve as a warning of much that is to follow—that the above was not the true title appertaining to Federigo, noble though he was; but, as it were, a nickname; what or where his family lands may have been I never learned.

However, having come into possession of them by the murder of a cousin, he had forthwith squandered their substance upon women, regardless of the fact that by law they were entailed to the succession. Naturally it was not long ere the goldsmiths of Florence and Leghorn, who had lent him money, began, finding repayment lacking, to look toward their

security—the said lands; which were no security at all.

It seems that in negotiating the loans Federigo had lied and perjured himself vastly concerning this entail; the Eight of Florence issued writs against him, but he hanged the servers thereof. And then, after the Pisans had attempted, with *condottieri*, to seize his person, the young man collected what remained of his troops and marched south to seek refuge in the castle of a friend; which being accorded him, he murdered the friend and seized the castle. Wherein, at the time I entered his service, he was woundy well established; safe from demands for the payment of his old debts and growing rich anew by the plundering of such as used the pass which the castle commanded.

He was a bad man, mark me well; a bad man. But how refreshing (after my last engagement with a Duke of Venieto that loved the common people) was the discipline that he enforced! The captain, my predecessor, had been dead a month; a foreign merchant had stabbed him, poor fellow (I mean the merchant); and, finding on my arrival that the lieutenant he had left in charge was but a lad of twenty, I expected the guard's first muster to be awful in its disorder.

But nay. Nay, nay. They were ragtail and bobtail from half a dozen countries, of different heights and breadths, and uniformed in twenty different liveries; but the fear of Federigo was over them all, and so they drilled like a regiment of brothers.

"What are the orders for the day?" I asked my lieutenant. I had arrived late the night before and had not as yet been summoned to the presence of my master.

He saluted before replying; very proper; a fine lad, I thought.

"The usual wall guards, Captain; guards for the north gate, the remainder in two companies, one at each end of the pass."

"What of the south gate?" I asked, looking at this, the main entrance to the castle.

"Under favor," says the youth, saluting again, "it was not the custom to put a guard therein. We receive no visits of state, and for all other visits the late Captain preferred to have his forces at the pass-heads."

"Ah?"

"Where they could be well seen," says the lieutenant, "and save mistakes."

"Ah?"

I make, I may here say, much use of "Ah?" in dealing with juniors; it is a mighty word wherewith to extract information from them, while at the same time conveying the idea that their news is ancient and not worth the hearing. Thus is discipline maintained.

"Under favor, yes," says the lieutenant. "An armed escort came to the western end once while we still guarded the gate, and when summoned to halt offered resistance. It was an error, of course, but we lost ten men; and the late captain conceived that a show of force at the beginning—"

"'Tis well," I interrupted. "I approve. Post the men as usual."

Saying which I turned away in omniscient fashion and retired to my quarters with intent to wonder leisurely what all this chatter of pass guards and armed escorts and shows of force might mean; for it must be remembered that I was new and not in the least acquainted with Federigo di Tonduzzi, his ways and means. The news concerning him which thou has read with such ease, my Andrea, was collected by me, bit by bit, over days. See what it is to have a father!

BUT NAY. I must confess, now I think thereon, that I was enlightened to nine-tenths of full knowledge almost at once; on the very evening of that day, in fact. My meditations in my quarters had ended it appeared, in sleep; the sun was on the horizon and the birds were sitting still to do their singing, when I was wakened by my lieutenant.

"The audience will be in an hour, Captain," says he.

"Ah?"

"His Lordship's audience—in an hour," the young man repeated as I rubbed my eyes. "We have four Romans, eight French traveling in a body and a young knight. Under favor—respectfully reported—Captain."

He added the last words in jerks, because he mistook for disapproval the glare of sleepy puzzlement which, despite myself, I had turned on him.

"Ah?" says I, dissimulating (as I gained control of myself) a wonder as to why we had the aforesaid four Romans, eight French and a knight, and what we should do with them now they were in our possession. "Well, dismissed. Send me a servant. Return thyself in half an hour."

"*Subito, Capitano!*"

"What's thy name?" I asked, as he went toward the door.

He had been well trained, that young man. He saluted before answering; said that he bore the name of Ugo under my favor only, and waited for the formal word of dismissal before leaving my presence. Ah, my son! After the freedom and equality of Venieto under the late Duke (he was exiled for his kindness) how did I luxuriate in this iron discipline! The servant I had commanded was at my door (with a stoup of wine and some cakes for me to eat while arming) almost before I had risen from bed. He was neat fingered and said "thank you" when I knocked him down for pulling a strap too tight. Altogether, it was with a light heart and a springy step that I marched with Ugo, at the head of twenty men, into the banqueting hall of the castle.

"Place them as usual," says I carelessly when we came to the great doors, wondering what the lad would do, but prepared to criticize his doing of it for his soul's good.

The hall was empty save for servants, of whom there were very many more than could possibly be needful. At one end, under a mighty display of banners and blazons, stood a table for one person and one high gilded chair, like a throne. Over the aforesaid table, after the manner of a napkin, there was thrown a piece of brocade worth a hundred crowns at least; and on the hither side of all was a sort of kneeling-stool, of which I could not divine the use. It was made of plain bare wood, all over knots; the which knots stood forth above the surface in a manner surprising when it was considered that the stool was seemingly new. Some hermit, to be sure, might have made himself such an oratory, supposing he had great sins to expiate in discomfort; but what was the place of a hermit's stool in the banqueting hall of a prince?

I was still staring at the object and revolving this question in my mind when Ugo, saluting, reported the guard duly set and informed me that his Lordship was about to enter.

Having said which, he looked at me as though expecting orders. Evidently there was more to do; though what, I could scarce imagine. The twenty men we had brought were formed into three sections —ten behind the gilt chair and five on each side of the table, at a respectful distance therefrom. My position would be with this guard. I walked toward it, casting back the word "Proceed!" over my shoulder.

And by the time four lackeys opened a private door and admitted the Count Federigo di Tonduzzi, Ugo had completed the evolution thus ordered. I scarce noticed him at the time, being occupied with a wonder as to the meaning of the command "Harrumph!" which I gave loudly on the entrance of the Count. The escort interpreted it to signify the "present arms" and the stepping forward of two men to the side of the praying stool; and it struck me that, for a stranger, I was marvelously versed in the ways of the castle.

NOW, with regard to Ugo. He was at the far end of the hall with an escort of soldiers, but also with a group of exceedingly huddled civilians—some twelve or thirteen, I made out; certes the four Romans, eight French and one knight of whom he had spoken earlier. They were gray bearded, for the most

part, and richly dressed, save the knight, who was both young and ragged; and I was astonied to see Ugo take one of them by the small of the back and shove him forward to the count's table.

Even more surprising was it to see the reverend unfortunate seized by the back of the neck and forced violently to his knees on the wooden stool. Yet this was customary; evidently the procedure of every day. The men-at-arms who had thrust the old man down scarce moved from their posture of attention so to do, and now remained in it as motionless as two statues, what time, between them, he babbled and raved in the French language.

I looked at the count. He was eating a peach.

Now the manner of his eating the peach was thus and no otherwise: He first impaled the fruit on a sort of silver skewer wherewith he held it in his left hand; and then with a small knife he commenced and cut the skin off it, roundabout, in a long curl. His ambition, seemingly, was to pare from the stalkward end to the other without breaking this curl; and when he failed, as he did twice, he would throw the peach back into the silver dish and take another.

With the third he had almost achieved his success (my eyes, and those of all the guard, fixed fascinated upon his fingers) when the wretch on the kneeling stool became even more emphatic than before and tried to rise. There was some little struggle as the men-at-arms forced him down again. The count's attention was distracted ever so little, and when I glanced at him again his face was livid with rage, and the paring was broken within a finger's breadth of the end.

"*Per la*—" says Federigo; but I will not indite his oath. Be it enough to say that it was both obscene and blasphemous; and that having said it, he hurled the peach with all his force into the face of the kneeling merchant, who seemed surprised thereat; it was many a year, by his looks, since he had been pelted with fruit. For a little while he even ceased to talk.

But alas! he recommenced; and now, almost shrieking with rage, he spoke of matters not within his province; to wit, of the King of France his vengeance; of the destruction, because of this outrage, of Federigo and his castle; and so on, and so on. To which the count listened, leaning forward with his elbows on the carved arms of his throne.

"Now, concerning ransoms—" says he, when at last the graybearded paused for breath.

"Ransom!" shrieks the old man, and continued with more threats. It was unwise of him—I knew it; but there was no order to silence him, so I stood at attention, wondering what would be the end of this.

"Lieutenant," says Federigo at last.

Ugo stepped forward and saluted. I noticed at this moment that, though young and pleasant faced as I have heretofore described, he had eyes remarkable in that they did not move; they remained, so to say, still in his head, surveying whatever was before them without emotion and without winking.

"Take me this merchant," says Federigo, selecting another peach, "and one of his French companions—no matter which, let them settle that themselves—and hang them, one at each end of the pass. Bring another prisoner."

"*Subito, Signor Conte,*" says Ugo, as though this were the commonest order in the world, and laid his hand on the old man's shoulder what time the men-at-arms assisted him none too gently to rise.

Son, I inform thee that it was incredible. I stood there dazed and quite unbelieving that what I had heard was meant in sober earnest. The Frenchman, for some instants, was in like case; he stared from Federigo (now totally occupied with his knife and his silver skewer) to me; then turned to glance into the face of Ugo; and then all about him as though in search of aid. After the which he began suddenly to babble more loudly than ever, and was still babbling and yelling in his cracked old voice so

that my spine crawled when he was dragged away.

"Captain," says the count, not raising his eyes from his peach; but I know not what order he was about to give, for at that moment the peace and even tenor of the occasion was disturbed by the arrival of the ragged young knight I have mentioned before. He had torn himself away from the guards at the other end of the hall, outdistanced them in his rush toward the table and, when I seized him, was about to hurl himself bodily at the Count Federigo.

Which would certes have spoiled the paring of the peach. As it was, what time the young knight struggled in my arms, his Lordship brought the matter to a happy conclusion.

"Pig's son!" spat forth the prisoner. "Murdering dog!"

Holding his fruit on the silver skewer, Federigo bit it; and, so doing, for the first time raised his eyes to the knight's face. A sharp look from deadly black eyes.

" 'Tis such as thee," gasps the young man, still struggling, "that bring us into contempt with the commonalty. Thou a noble! I spit on thy shield!"

Now the count leaned back in his chair; also he sniffed the peach before biting it again.

"Aye, I'm to be meat for thy hangman likewise," the prisoner went on. "There's no ransom to be had from me. All I have is my sword."

Federigo chuckled.

"Which hath been taken from thee, seemingly," he said.

'Take over," says I to the two men-at-arms, for the boy's struggles were tiring me; and right well I knew that loose, he would interrupt the count's repast in no uncertain fashion.

" 'Tis as well I'm unarmed!" roars the young man. "Thou knowest thy trade, butcher! 'Tis a rope thou wearest at thy belt!"

Now at this Federigo laid down his peach and leaned forward.

"Had I my sword still I'd purge nobility of a foul blot," says the knight. "Go to, hangman!"

Instantly the count arose. Likewise, with one motion, he cast from off his shoulders the rich robe he was wearing and appeared in his hose and a tunic of purple linen. He had a fine chest, and arms like a blacksmith; one would not have suspected such, from the whiteness and fineness of his hands.

"Give him his sword," says Federigo. "And, Captain, lend me thine. Loose him, you fellows. Give him his sword."

NEVER saw I such a change in a man. Taking the blade which I held forth to him with a profound obeisance, my master with his other hand pushed his richly decked dining table so that it fell over and threw the right hand file of guards into confusion.

"Stand back there—clear a space!" says he, tossing my hilt around in his hand and fretting with his feet on the flagstones. "Give him a sword, some one—thou, soldier! The devil gloat over my bones if I'll be bearded longer thus. Give him a sword, I say!"

"My Lord—" says I, starting forward; because that which the knight now had was a guardsman's sword, and long; whereas mine, in the count's hands, was a full hand's breadth shorter. But I might as well have protested to a whirlwind. Even as I spoke, the knight had taken a position of defense; and before I could say aught more, the count was upon him, using point and edge, edge and point, in such indistinguishable mixture as never had I beheld.

He seemed to fight recklessly, ignoring the due proportion of cuts to thrusts; delivering often his point without preparation, and for guard seeming to rely entirely on the fury of his attack, which should leave the opponent no time for a reply. And indeed the young knight passed but one thrust; the which Federigo parried with his bare left hand, and rewarded with a cut sufficient to decapitate a bullock.

How it missed the knight's neck, where-

at it was aimed, I know not; the young man bent belike, or slipped, thus losing no more than a lock of hair; but it was to be seen that his end was decided, unless Federigo weakened suddenly. But he did not. He seemed to grow stronger as he attacked; he forced his adversary back; first one step, and then two steps at a time; he fenced him away from the wide maneuvering ground of the body of the hall, and drove him toward the wall—the wall to the right of the overturned table.

There was an alcove in this wall, a narrow alcove, man width. I perceived that it was toward this that, after the manner of a seaman with a boat, Federigo was steering the young knight. He cut at his head and he pointed at his breast; he feigned to sweep a low blow at his knees and then prodded him backward with a feint at his stomach, always urging him toward that alcove until, just in front of it, he first thrust, and then lunged, at the boy's throat. The thing was done deliberately; for never heretofore during the fight had he done aught but lunge without warning. He desired that the young man, knowing what was to come, should leap backward. Which he did—into the alcove.

Its walls gripped the young knight's arms; his face, of a sudden, was overspread with terror at the unexpected. After a moment's inspection whereof, and with a short laugh, Federigo clove his head down the middle.

"So!" says he, throwing my sword on the ground and turning away even before the body had crumpled. "Push him forth by the window, you. At once. Get him out of the moat tomorrow."

So saying, he walked over to the table picked up the piece of brocade and wiped his hands on it. Then, without aid, he put on his robe again and fastened it about his waist with his girdle of braided gold cord. He was a little moist about the temples, but nothing to signify; also, he breathed somewhat quickly and his eyes darted about.

Down at the foot of the hall the prisoners were weeping and calling upon the saints to aid them; it was a strange scene.

"I will deal with these others tomorrow," says the count, turning toward his private door and beckoning me to follow him. "The audience is dismissed."

A week later

THE RHEUMATISM hath afflicted me these eight days—I hope not to thy perdition, Andrea. Full of dread at the consequences to thee of this delay, I twice attempted to continue this narrative of warning, but could not make my fingers wrap about the pen. Even now I groan at every capital letter and wish I had not attempted to be what the world calls a good father to thee.

However, since I am at that well reputed business, *avanti*. I will say that these and subsequent doings of the Count Federigo were much against my stomach. God forbid that I should pretend to lily handed upbringing, or to a taste for dove-like dealings between man and man. Society is founded upon force, and after fifty years' experience of statesmanship and soldiering I do woundily believe that the sooner force is used in any argument the better. Early or late, force decides the question; and the longer appeal to it is delayed, the higher is the cost of the affair, both in time and money. I speak as a soldier, and moreover as one with rheumatics; but indeed I have often wondered whether the virtues of forbearance and altruism were not invented by lawyers and statesmen to make money for themselves.

Where was I?

Yes, I was about to say that, these beliefs notwithstanding, I found Federigo's methods a little too direct for my taste. As I think I have shown thee, and as I certes could show thee much more plainly did not my affliction forbid the detailed description of the next month or so, my master had shorn life of all its truces and treaties, and come nakedly down to reality; by stern application to the which (while other folk dallied with natural feeling and the Ten Commandments) he

was thriving vastly. He was indeed the perfect apostle of mine own beliefs—too perfect; his perfection was painful to me, and I decided to leave that employ.

As though sensing which, he sent for me one day and by a simple method delayed my departure.

"At last I have work for thee, Caradosso," says my lord by way of introduction to the matter. "I doubt not thou'lt welcome a chance to earn thy wages for once."

He had me there, more tightly than he knew; for indeed it had preyed somewhat on my mind that in his service I had drawn high pay for very little work, delegating most of what should have been my duty to the lieutenant Ugo, who highway-robbed, imprisoned and hanged to order with an impassivity I could not match. Had there been fighting, had there been ceremonial, I would have allowed none to take my place; but since these other matters formed the routine of this extraordinary guard, I had more and more relinquished active duty to my junior.

Now, it appeared, there was business of my own sort toward; whereat I rejoiced—until Federigo became more explicit of particulars. I was to be left in charge of the castle what time the count, followed by three-quarters of the forces, went forth to make unprovoked attack on a neighboring noble.

"Meseems the richer folk are avoiding this pass," says my lord calmly, his hands on his stomach. "Probably news hath spread. So that I plan a month of peace wherein, passing freely, the fools may be reassured, and once more bring me purses worth the taking. Meantime I must have money, and my lord of Tareto is the most convenient source. He is old, friendly, friendless, and only twenty miles away."

Saying this, the count stared long at my face, and chuckled at what he seemed to find thereupon.

"Now thine own part in this matter," says he, leaning forward with his hands still folded, "is as follows: to hold this castle against my return. I am aware of thee, my Luigi, better than thou knowest; it is no news to me that thou dost detest and loathe my method of life, and that thou dost consider me worthier of hanging than most of those I hang.

"I retain thee in my service because thine opinion is naught to me, whereas thy military skill may be much. And I trust thee to apply that skill conscientiously on my behalf—wherefore? I tell thee because otherwise thou wilt think me a fool. Thou wilt not hand over the castle to mine enemies, which would much advantage thee in bribe-money; thou wilt on the contrary fight for me beyond even thine ability, for the very reason that I am so loathsome to thee. To betray thy master, though it brought thee a kingdom, would make thee like unto me; than which thou wouldst rather die. Not so?"

There was nothing to be said to this. With his black eyes and his mocking smile Federigo was no fit recipient of polite perjuries. On the other hand, it is not correct for a captain in uniform to call his lord, even indirectly, a murderer, a thief and a false traitor.

So I followed a procedure which had aforetime served me well in such situations: namely, said nothing, but came smartly to the salute.

"Despite which," says Federigo, still regarding me mockingly, "I remain aware that human nature, in its higher emotions, is but frail; wherefore, Captain, I shall leave with thee one—at least one—charged with the sole duty of cutting thy throat or otherwise ending thee, should by chance the castle be handed over to mine enemies. The expedition will leave tomorrow at dawn. We shall return the next day. Dismissed."

SO HE went away, and in his absence I gazed about me with interest. There was little danger of attack on the castle. In the first place, none knew that my lord was absent; in the second, his depredations had been directed against three or four towns, so that no one would take the lead without the others; and

in the third, his victims had been mostly merchants of the smaller sort, whose rights, guaranteed equally important with those of the nobles and the great traders at voting time, are nevertheless rarely supported with armed force.

Nay, mine interest centered chiefly on him who was to cut my throat, should necessity arise; it was not long ere I found that 'twas the still eyed Lieutenant Ugo who had accepted this responsible task. I know not whether he was aware that behind him, wherever he followed me, there came a sergeant; from what I now know of the said Ugo, I think it probable both that he did, and that he did not care a jot. For he was (as I think to have remarked ere this) a remarkable young man, who grew more phenomenal with closer acquaintance. He reminded me ever of some dark, deserted and exceeding deep pool in a forest, whereof the placid surface mirrors in turn sun, moon, stars; green leaves, red leaves and bare branches; birds, squirrels and elephants, if elephants should pass—without betraying by one ripple the life of its own depths.

For instance, when the watchmen blew news that the count's returning column was in sight, I spoke to the young man of his late mission, intending to make a joke of the affair to the limits permitted by discipline. But he did not smile; nor did he frown; nor (to my greater astonishment) did he assume an air of puzzlement becoming one who had never heard of such a matter before; merely he looked at me with his extraordinary eyes, in silence.

It was disconcerting in the highest degree.

"Go down and muster the gate guard," says I roughly; and myself descended to don ceremonial armor, more than ever decided to leave this castle as soon as might be. There was a something about it which, at the best, uneased me; and which at the worst (for example now, after my speech with mine own lieutenant) gave me gooseflesh along my spine.

"Captain! Captain!" I heard him calling outside my door just as my servant finished the last strap of the harness.

"Aye?"

"There are two litters in the column," says Ugo.

Meseemed that a little silence and impassivity on mine own part might be of aid to discipline; so to this I made no reply until I was well and truly buckled and had curled my mustachios. Then, opening the door, I remarked that mostlike the count had been wounded during the affair (wherein I was right) and that the other litter contained his late adversary; which in fact it did not, but instead the person of the said adversary's daughter.

Since we approach, with her advent, the meat of this story, O my son, I would have thee be particular to note that, having some skill in wound dressing but none in the preparation of apartments for pretty women, I stayed with the count when he was borne to his quarters, and left Ugo to see after the Lady Maria. Over and above this, mark you, I was intent on my duty; certes it would have been more pleasant to comfort the girl than to dabble up to the elbows in blood let by somebody else; but I was of opinion that 'twas at his bedside that I could best serve the count.

Alas the vanity of human judgments!

It was a bad wound, which I thought might be fatal until, rising from the bandaging of it after I had dug forth the broken blade of a poniard, I perceived Federigo's eyes fixed upon me with such a look as no man dare wear near his latter end.

"Have the girl and the treasure both safely bestowed," say the count evenly. And so, turning on his unhurt side, fell into a peaceful sleep which lasted twenty-four hours. This, mark you, after the murder of one that had welcomed him, the sack and burning of a stronghold, the carrying off of a noblewoman—which was death by the wheel for no matter who did it—and the reception (from the said lady) of a stab that, one thumb's breadth higher, would have let out the life of the devil himself.

I am emphatic upon his sleeping, and on the rapid recovery to which it led, because 'twas this, first of all, which showed me that this count my master was indeed the incredible animal he had seemed to be—a really bad man; bad by habit, bad by training and, above all, bad by nature. There are many to whom this rare title is applied who do not deserve it, any more than do armed citizens deserve the name of soldiers. These former may fight well upon occasion, but let the circumstances change, and straightway they are seen to be no more than stocking sellers who have mislaid their yardsticks and picked up swords by mistake. Similarly, there be nobles a many, and common men not a few, who have committed woundy crimes, and that habitually, but have they slept afterwards?

There is the test; which my lord passed (as I have said) with great credit. On the fourth day after his wounding, indeed, he was able to sit up in his great bed while his treasurer read forth the list of goods stolen in the raid, and to express in terms which still linger in a memory only too well provided with such things, his intentions concerning the Lady Maria.

"Can she dance?" he demanded of me.

"My Lord, I do not know."

"Well, can she play upon the lute then, or juggle, or some such thing?"

"Sir, I am not aware."

"Thou'rt damned ignorant, for an old rogue that's had a pretty girl near him nigh a week."

I could have flung a medicine bottle at him; but he was a sick man, and besides, he would certes have had me hanged.

"Fearing that news of your Lordship's illness might have reached enemy towns," says I therefore, in careful wise, "I have been much occupied in strengthening the defenses and arranging for their protection in case of need. I have scarce seen the young lady since her arrival."

"Is she still safe?" demands Federigo, sitting bold upright, the which was dangerous. "See to it that she is, Caradosso, for I have need of her. She shall chirp and hop for my delectation, I promise you, the spitfire she-devil, so soon as I am strong enow to enjoy it."

"She hath been in the charge of my lieutenant," I told him. "Doth your Lordship please that I should send the young man to report?"

A slow change was spreading over the count's face; he seemed puzzled at something, and paler than he had been. And as he said "aye," his mouth fell open, and he himself fell backward on the bed, so that I thought with some rejoicing that he had been stricken from on high in the midst of his iniquity; and I sent for a priest. But even before the leech (we had captured one by this time) could pronounce for a mere faintness resulting from over-excitement, the count had revived enow to dismiss the priest with scorn and to demand, in a whisper like a death rattle, the attendance of a corporal that knew all the licentious songs of the camps, and sang them pleasantly; in the listening to which fellow he passed the rest of that day.

As for me, having ordered Ugo to attend with particulars of Federigo's human booty, I returned to my work on the walls and gates, feeling more than ever eager to depart from that place. I will here protest that I was not afraid either of earthly retribution, by neighbors to wit, for my part in Federigo's doings; nor of spiritual damnation, even; nor of anything else. Simply I felt (and I would have thee mark this especially, my son, for it is to the point) that I was engaged upon a business foreign to me; strange to my way of life theretofore, and for the which I had not the equipment requisite.

AT THAT time, needless to say, I had not my doctrines clear, in so many words; codification of such things is the function of age. But in the wise back of my mind I was of opinion that, according to the ancient proverb, the shoemaker had better stick to his last, the captain to his captaincy, and the bravo to his murdering, lest worse befall. And at

the change of watch that day I sought audience with Federigo and asked for my dismissal.

"I am in no state to discuss such things, Captain," says he, "but the answer is 'nay.' Sing me that song about the king's daughter again, you man."

"The defenses are completed—a child could defend this place," says I.

"Under a captain, yes," says Federigo. "Now go, Caradosso. Is this virtue, to leave me without a commander when I am at the point of death?"

"I had thought that the Lieutenant Ugo could succeed me," says I. "He is competent and—er—"

"More of mine own kind, thou wouldst say? Ah, but look you, my Luigi; 'tis just for that reason that I trust him not. I know too much of his like to confide aught to his loyalty unguarded. Nay, more; so hath he developed into mine own likeness since he came here, that I would fain be rid of him altogether. I think of dismissing him entirely; so that thou'lt be captain and lieutenant both. I can not let thee go. However, go now, for I would enjoy this fellow's roarings. Roar, man."

So I went down the stairs from the sick-room pursued by a ballad hitherto heard by me only in camps after battles, and only then if the singers were all drunk.

"Doth she play upon the lute?" I asked of Ugo, whom I met in the corridor of my quarters.

"Aye, Captain," says he.

"Then God help her," I said. "Is the guard set?"

I noted that he stared at me with his still eyes for full three heart-beats before he saluted and answered, and I expected some question, but none came. For an instant, moreover, I thought to see below the surface of those eyes. Meseemed that in their depths, for an instant, something moved visibly, but ere I could look well, there was naught to be seen.

"Yes, Captain," says Ugo. "Is there aught other order for the night?"

"When the girl goes to the count, search her well."

"Yes, Captain."

"Down to the skin," says I, winking and watching his eyes. "Aye?"

No flicker.

"Aye, Captain."

"Then good night."

"Good night, Captain."

WELL, for one reason and another, it was a week before Federigo had strength or leisure for the girl; whom, meantime, I had scarce seen at all. Ugo had charge of that side of the castle wherein her chambers were, and to him I left all details of her lodgment, tiring and victualing; for among other trades for which I felt myself unfitted was this of fattening a lamb for the slaughter. Besides, I was full of affairs. Since the expedition's return, the guarding of the pass and the capture of travelers for ransom had been resumed, and there was a large assembly in the dungeons by the time Federigo was able to begin his judgings.

He sat up in bed supported by pillows, with his guard about him and the kneeling stool before him, just as in the great hall. And so pale was his face, and so did his black eyes stab forth from it, that scarce any prisoners had to be hanged as examples to the others. All were but too willing to order their businesses bankrupted, their houses sold, or what-not, to obey my lord.

In one day I despatched no less than six horsemen bearing orders upon bankers and such-like, for nigh twelve thousand florins; and it was in the evening of that day that Federigo sent for the Lady Maria.

"Fetch the wench," says he, in what voice he had left after terrifying twenty captives. "Let her bring her lute."

And when she had come:

"Stay thou, Caradosso," says my lord, as I saluted and turned to the door. "There is reason why, in that she stabbed me once; and since I am weary tonight, there is no reason to the contrary."

He glanced at the girl, to see her wince; but this she did not. She stood there, lute

in her hands (Ugo must have found one somewhere in the castle) and made no move; a tall girl of perhaps nineteen; pretty enough, though in a style not to mine own taste.

"Sing, then, dog's daughter!" snarls Federigo. "Sit and sing!"

So she sat (looking at me with some contempt) and she plucked a string or two of the instrument, to find that all was in tune; and then, in a low voice, she asked Federigo what was his pleasure in the way of songs.

"Thou art not conversant with any current indecencies," says my lord reflectively. "No? I must have them sung beneath thy window henceforth; we have a professor for such trifles here with us. And I suppose thou hast composed no ode upon the capture of thy lamented father's castle?"

"Odes," says the girl, "are for the deeds of heroes."

"Well said," says Federigo, "certes I deserve something better than that. In any case, sing, strumpet; and well, or I pelt thee with fruit."

She thought a moment—all impassive and unmoved, meseemed; and then she played a chord and began. At which same moment, Federigo yawned, stretched his arms and picked up a book which lay beside him; reading with apparent absorption while the daughter of his slain victim sang some sad innocent thing about birds in springtime.

And when she had done:

"Damnably bad," says Federigo. "Sing again. And thou, Caradosso—thou amusest me not. Go fetch thy lieutenant to replace thee."

Whereat, in the midst of my relief at this dismissal, the Lady Maria flung herself on her knees and burst into tears and implorings.

Now, I should explain that by force of being kept abed when his habit in health was of the most active, my good master had suffered very much from the boredom, especially since the captives for ransom had shown themselves so complaisant. I know not whether this boredom had much to do with what followed, but I mention it here on the supposition.

As I have perhaps shown, the coming of Maria had not woundily interested him; his dealings with her had been perfunctory, and whenas she had sung, he had turned his attention to the book. This (at her falling down upon the floor and beseeching as aforesaid) was the first real interest he had shown since his wounding. He sat forward on the bed and wrapped his long arms about his knees.

"Now in the devil's name—" he began, Maria's words being, at the start, much broken by her sobs.

"Ah, sir," she burst forth, as he craned to see her better, "have mercy on me so far. My father is dead by thee; our lands are gone; do with me further what thou wilt—save only this."

Federigo glanced at me and raised one eyebrow.

"Oho, indeed," says he. "And what is 'this'?"

"Do not," cries Maria, holding up her joined hands in prayer, "do not send for the lieutenant. Do not let him see me thus. I pray thee, my Lord, do not send for Ugo; in mercy, no!"

"Well, by Joshua his whiskers," says my lord, visibly amazed, but amused likewise. He had, as I say, been bored.

"It is in some sort for thine own sake," the girl went on, in a manner of frenzy. "Look you, Sir Count, as he saw me thus treated, think you Ugo would stand by like yon hairy man—who, even so, hath pity for me?"

The count looked at me again.

"How now, Caradosso?" says he; but before I could answer, Maria had got up and rushed over to the bed. I went and stood behind her, holding both her arms above the elbow; but even so I hoped Ugo had searched her thoroughly—the man who can hold a passionate woman from doing damage is not yet born.

I FORGET (being occupied with this holding) what next Maria said. It was more to the effect that Ugo loved her, and that she loved him, and that

they were at one on this subject; and that he was most like to murder the Count Federigo if he were crossed—for she had your true lover's delusion as to the strength and power of the beloved; together with much raving about cottages in the doorways whereof she and my young lieutenant had, it seemed, much ambition to sit while growing old together.

This last was naught new to me. I have noticed it as a habit with lovers *before* marriage, this doting upon poverty to be experienced together; they change later, but no matter for that. What I would convey is that now this accustomed sickliness made me laugh; so much did it seem out of place here, in this stone flagged hall of the furies, and with the chief fury for audience.

Rarely do I smile on duty; but on this occasion my risibilities were beyond me. I felt mirth rising in a hard lump under my breast bone, the which I must dissolve and let out in a guffaw.

Wherein, to the extent of a smile, Federigo joined me. Also, he lay back on his pillows and turned over upon one elbow, facing the girl and considering.

"Matteo!" he called suddenly; and to the sentry that appeared, "Send me the Lieutenant Ugo."

The stiffening seemed to go out of Maria; her struggles ceased. Yet I did not by any means loose her; indeed, having glanced around the curve of her cheek and seen with what expression her eyes were fixed on the count, I profited by the chance and withdrew her as far as possible from my lord. Searched or unsearched, she still had her hands, her nails and her passions; to which trinity nothing is impossible. I trust thou dost mark me well, Andrea, in view of thine approaching marriage? I scatter pearls.

Well, Ugo came; and looked at me as I held Maria; and I expected to see below the surface veil of his eyes, and was disappointed. He was as ever he had been; he saluted, said, "My Lord!" and advanced toward the bed as though he had never seen the Lady Maria before. I was quite astonied when Federigo, reaching into the bed-head, drew forth a pistolet and presented it at Ugo.

"No nearer," says my lord. "Stand still, Master Lieutenant. What's this I hear?"

"My Lord—"

"Let us lose no time. Turn and look at the wench."

For a moment he did not turn, but stood staring at the count and his pistolet.

"There's no more stabbing of me to be done, thou seest," says Federigo, "though there may be some little hanging of thee, later. Meantime, look at the lady. Left turn!"

Ugo obeyed; nay, more than this. In turning he stretched out his arms and gave a gasp and fell on his knees—at first I thought to me, until I remembered that I held Maria. It was a strange sensation, to see my impressive junior thus overtaken by his emotions; and stranger still to see that, what time he choked forth love words that made me blush, his eyes remained much as they had ever been. I was reminded of the coming forth of fire from a snow capped mountain which I once saw with these eyes at Naples.

Federigo signed to me to let the girl go; and before I had well loosed her, lo and behold those twain—Ugo still on his knees—clasped in each other's arms and forgetful of us as though we had never been.

I sweated; Federigo, his black eyes fixed, softly poured forth a stream of astonishing oaths; and still this insane embrace endured.

Finally my lord lay back.

"Caradosso," he said weakly (being a little faint, as who shall blame him?) "what's to do?"

At this, the Lady Maria raised her head, as a woman will under no matter, what circumstances, when her advantage is in question.

"I had intended to shoot the boy," says Federigo listlessly. "Meseemed it would add salt to the wench."

"Ah, my Lord!" cries Maria; and in a twinkling was at the bedside once more.

Again I forget her words; for one thing, there were so many of them; and for another, who can follow a woman's pleading? Its twists and turns are bad enow, and such as to baffle the brain of a snake; but there are also crevasses, great leaps from fact to fancy and back again, with nothing between but a sob or a clasping of the hands which can not be translated into hand of write.

But what she proposed remains in my mind clear enough, so amazing was it; namely, that the Count Federigo then present, whom she had stabbed and whom she had threatened with assassination by another hand, whom she, his just prey, had in a manner of speaking betrayed by this love affair with his servant, should permit her and the Lieutenant Ugo to depart scatheless from his presence and from that Castle of the Narrow Pass and seek happiness in the cottage she had mentioned.

"Well, by Jehoshaphat his—" Federigo began, when she was well begun; but she swept him aside, and thenceforth he listened with his jaw dropped. Alas, what more can I say for the count than I have said already? He had been awearied of his bed; he was not well. There are moments, as we all know, when even to men in the best of health, the life hitherto lived seems dull, evil and unprofitable; other moments, which come and go like clouds across the face of the sun, wherein a man is for no reason stark mad. I myself have known a period (to be sure I was near death at the time) when I wished I had married!

Of course, the count he also had been near death; I mention all these things to show that there were excuses for him. As far as I am aware, Andrea, there are none such for thee. . . .

But why do I boggle about, spilling words like a writer, when all my intent is to show thee a course of action like unto that which thou dost propose to take, and to point forth what came of it?

Shortly let me say, then (ere I go to rub my poor aching hands with unguent) that then and there before my astonied eyes, because of his boredom, because of his sickness, because of a plethora of the liver or a fit of lunacy such as I have mentioned before, the Count Federigo performed his first and only act of mercy, the one good deed of his career.

He sent for the priest upon whom (coming to shrive him) he had spat; he had Ugo and the Lady Maria wedded then and there in his presence; and, the ceremony accomplished, he told them to go in peace, and me to provide them with horses and the necessities for the journey.

"Then return hither," says he drowsily, for his last strength had been used in laughing at the marriage vows, "I would talk with thee, Caradosso."

The which I did, but he was asleep when I entered, and I did not awake him.

Before withdrawing, however, I noticed one strange thing; that, for the first time his sleep was troubled and he tossed and groaned.

Four days later

I DICTATE (my hand having stiffened beyond further use) to the son of Arcangelo the turnip farmer. When peasants' sons in their fifteenth year can write and read, the world must indeed be topsy-turvy; and I feel less strange in this my concern for the welfare of another person.

My last stanza said that the Count Federigo tossed and groaned; I will add that he had good reason so to do, which perhaps he perceived whenas sleep had freed his mind from its waking limitations. Now that the writing cramps are not mine, I could tell thee much about this same business of sleep; how that in taking away a man's bodily powers, it doth often release forces of the mind undreamed of by the sleeper. I could give examples of the most astonishing, but I will content myself by saying that there is much in the ancient proverb which counsels a man to sleep upon a project of importance before putting it into execution. The waking mind may remember some of the con-

clusions of its sleeping counterpart; which I think was the case with Federigo, on the day after the marriage.

I went to his chamber for orders, as usual, at eight of the morning, to find him very white and weak, but already risen from bed and dressed; and noted that, what time he talked to me of castle affairs he seemed to be thinking of another matter.

"It is well that yon Ugo is gone," says he, glancing at me uneasily. "I had no peace in his presence. And as for the wench—it is not pleasant to have one about that has stabbed once. She may do it again, and my inwards would not tolerate more steel."

I said naught; the count fiddled with a button.

"'Twas a good stroke to wed them," he says, laughing a little. "It sent them away post haste; and besides, I can think of no greater revenge on Ugo than to marry her. Matrimony in a passion is like a dead dog in a flower bed. Hast thou not found it so, Luigi Caradosso?"

"I have never been married, my Lord."

"I have—many times," says Federigo absently. "Besides, the reports of my clemency in this case, spreading, may discount— Not that I have ever heard good report to spread as far as bad—"

He trailed into silence, still playing with the button; then, suddenly rousing himself, commanded me to have the great hall made ready for the judgment of the captives; with whom, during all that morning, he dealt in most savage manner. Alas, my son, he felt that he had marred the image of his former self and he was trying to reconstitute it. Too late, too late!

It was not a week, ere from the north came rumors of troop raising in Rometia; not a week ere a stripling mocked Federigo with a tale of levies being armed at Venieto. And ere a month was out we learned from a captured sergeant of free lances (he had no money, but could hold his tongue, and so lived to chat with me in the guardroom) that these troops, and others that were being drilled by four cities more distant, were for our destruction.

"But," says I, aghast and puzzled, "how is it that now, of a sudden, they have settled their differences and come at concerted action? Is it sure that they will attack together?"

"Sure as death. This young what's his name—the girl's husband—is to command. Somewhat of a soldier, too, by what they tell me."

"Ugo?" I asked, with a sick feeling in the stomach.

"That's the name," says the sergeant, snapping his fingers. "'Tis his business on which all the cities have agreed—or rather hers; this taking of her father's castle by your count. I heard this Ugo address a mob about it in Rometia. He spoke well, but 'twas the girl turned the trick.

"She was in a white dress, and stretched out her arms and sobbed. And when it comes to asking a man to be knocked on the head for what's no affair of his, a sob or a blast on a trumpet's worth all the fine reasonings that ever were made. The young man was a firebrand, and got no recruits; but when the lady said, 'Will no one avenge me?' o' course a dozen said they would. It was wonderful how her tears dried up after."

"Aye, aye."

There was in my mind a clear memory of how Ugo had made love to Maria in the count's chamber. There was also a great apprehension. I left the sergeant with the wine bucket and sought the count.

"So?" says he easily. "Well, hang a prisoner—nay, if we've got one from each of the cities, hang 'em all. And let one go to tell the tale. If I'm attacked, moreover, there'll be no quarter for prisoners or wounded, and I'll hang every man from Rometia or Venieto that comes into my hands henceforth. Tell the messenger that, likewise."

As I passed to the doorway after saluting, he called me back.

"And—Caradosso. Cut one of the man's ears off, to remind him of his charge."

BUT IT was all of no use; the troops were gathered and armed; the ends of the pass were blocked before we could revictual for a siege of more than a month; and no terrors that Federigo could propose were sufficient to hold off the attack. And it was well delivered. Ugo's eyes had not belied him. He did not fling his troops against our walls, willing as they were to be so flung; he sent them underground, mining in so many places that, countermine as we would, we could not meet all their saps.

So a tower fell, and then another, and then the middle of a wall; so that to the south there was but a barricade of loose rubble between us and the enemy. We had, of course, the citadel remaining; but it was a week before they drove us into it—I am proud of that much.

With this retreat, and considering the shortness of the food, our defeat became but a matter of time; despite which evident fact, Federigo repelled all thought of surrender. 'Twas wise on his part, since death was all that awaited him thereafter; but the garrison (until he reasoned with it in his own peculiar style) was of another opinion. He took the soldiers' spokesmen and—but that is a long story, and moreover my amanuensis would faint at the tale; suffice it to say that the mutiny was crushed.

But the mining went on, unseen and relentless; they had gunpowder, to boot, and in blowing up an angle of wall blew up also fifty picked men. With what remained, we must needs retire to the tower of the citadel; to support us wherein we had rations for just three days. Hope —of which one ounce is worth many pounds of beef—we had none.

The first day passed; the second (we could hear, from below, the faint sound of picks at work on another mine) and the third; the flour barrels were empty; there was no more wine; nothing remained but the water of the citadel well, and it was slimy beyond belief.

At evening, in the room which I had assigned to myself so that discipline might be maintained to the last, there appeared to me Federigo, pale and tired, with his right arm bandaged where an arrow had pierced the flesh, but with his black eyes still diabolical as ever.

"Were last night's prisoners hanged well in view?" he asked; for we had made a sortie at his express wish.

"Yes, my Lord."

He seated himself on the edge of a table.

"Ah, well, Caradosso," says he, "I think the time has come to end this. The siege no longer amuses me; I am weary of it. So we will surrender."

He pulled from his finger a great emerald ring which he had always worn and began trying at the setting with his thumbnail.

"We could hold out another day," says I.

"Of what use? Nay, we have done well enow. And since we are not to meet again, Caradosso, I will make thee a confession. 'This state of affairs hath been brought about by one thing, and one alone—a deed of mine; the marrying of those two fools and the letting of 'em go. Thereby I provided mine enemies with a standard for rallying, and at the same time diminished the terror of my name, so that rally they dared. Well I knew how the lack of mercy and the denial of all humanity had served me in the past. It was my duty, not only to myself, but to thee and all dependent on me to continue in that way; not that in my soul I care a jot for thee, or for duty, or for my dependents. But I was a-weary and unwell, and I craved the gush of pleasure which is to be seen on some folks' faces when they do somewhat to their own disadvantage; so— Lend me thy dagger, Captain."

He slipped its point into the ring and prized up the emerald. It was hinged, and under it was a hollow from which he poured into his hand a red powder. This powder he threw into his mouth and swallowed it; after which he licked remaining grains from his palm and tossed the ring to me.

"I am going to die in the upper cham-

ber," says he. "It will take me some five minutes. See that I am not disturbed."

With which words, and nodding in reply to my salute, he opened the door and went out; next to be seen by me all doubled backward over a chair, with his face set into an expression of the uttermost horror. I learned afterward that the poison for the ring had been provided by an apothecary who bore my Lord Federigo a grudge—I forget wherefore; his son had been murdered, or some such thing; and he had given a hard poison where an easy one had been commanded. . .

But what was this? A mere trifle; just one more small stone in the edifice which sin unbridled had built for Federigo; and wherein he had lived most comfortably until the touch of virtue brought it crash.

In the author's hand

My writer hath a sweetheart, and she passed in the street, and I must finish this alone. I am in too much pain to point morals. Take what thou canst find.

Thy father,

—L. CARADOSSO.

Letter dated a month later which enclosed the foregoing.

Most dear Roberto:

I did not tell thee at the time that yon young bravo that thou didst spare when he was overtaken by the green sickness was my son; at least I think so. But after thy departure, being lonely and without occupation, methought it would be well to exercise the fatherly office for once in my life amd warn him of the perils of *la vita nuova.*

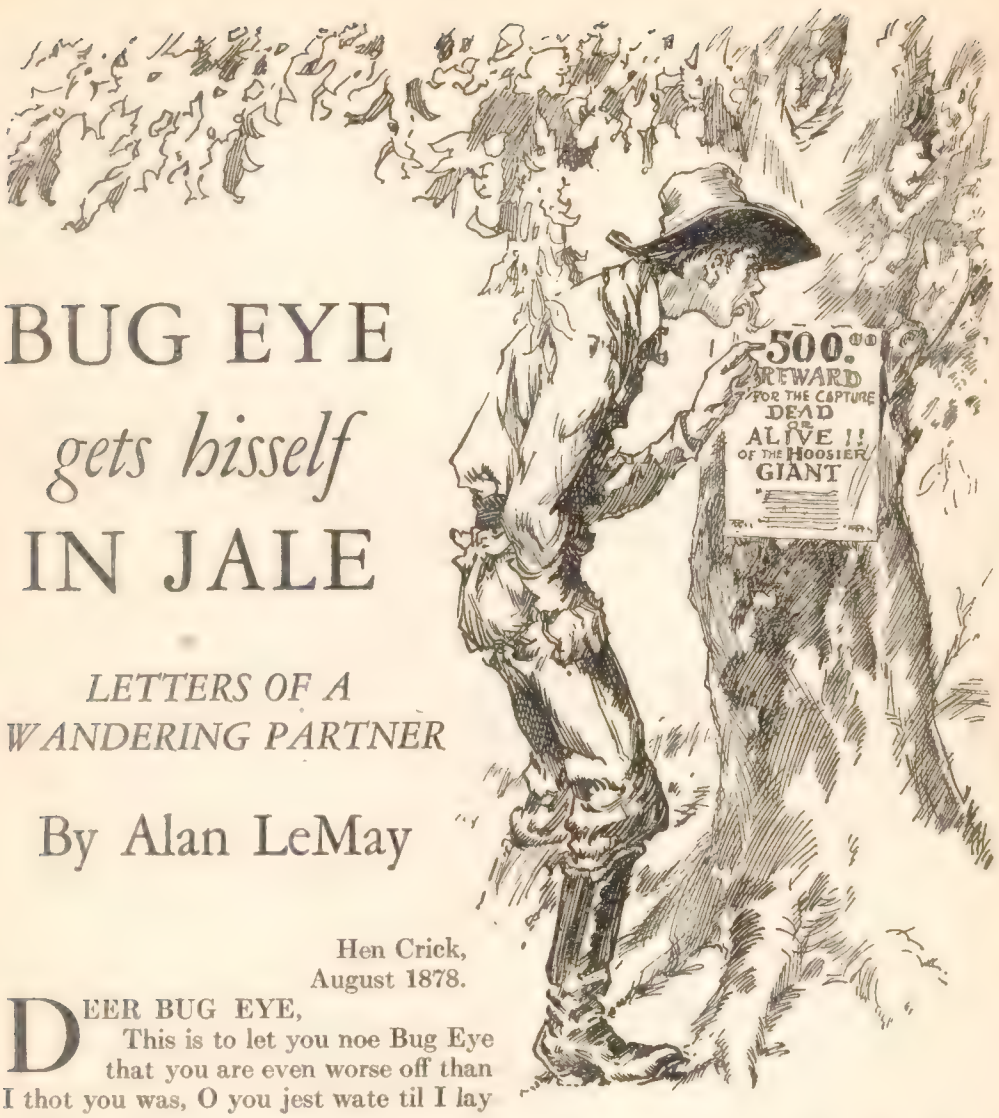
I send it to thee, hoping that thou mayest be amused thereby, because he would not read it, beyond the first page. He found therein an insult to his mother, on account whereof he came hither, flung the manuscript in my face and stuck a knife into my right shoulder, very deep. It aches damnably at this writing, and I have rheumatism and moreover my right hand is agonizing from the writing.

My first try to be aught but the worst of fathers!

With love,

—L. CARADOSSO

aetat. LXXJ and still a fool.



BUG EYE *gets hisself* IN JALE

LETTERS OF A WANDERING PARTNER

By Alan LeMay

Hen Crick,
August 1878.

DEER BUG EYE,

This is to let you noe Bug Eye that you are even worse off than I thot you was, O you jest wate til I lay hands on you.

Yoo had no rite to get impashunt Bug Eye jest becaus I was delaid a munth or 2 with the grub, I explaned to you in my letters jest wy I was delaid and if you did not get all of my letters it is not my fault I can not help it if very few fellers ride over tord Elk Mowntin to take letters.

I reelize that you didunt hav any spoon vittels or salt or such wen I left to go after grub Bug Eye but you had severil rounds of powder left, plenty to last you fer sum time if you was prudent and did not waste any shootin animels of smal size. An anybuddy of your age an strength shoud of got along all rite even if I did not get back with the flowr an stuff as soon as I expected.

In short you was perfeckly all rite on Elk Mowntin Bug Eye an didunt hav no excuse to brake yer werd an leeve camp jest becaus I was delaid. I hav figgered out Bug Eye that I coudent hav ben gone morn 6 wks wen you puled up stakes and left camp, and heer I hav ben toilin an laberin an swettin to bring you grub to a plase ware you hav not ben fer upwerds of a munth an ½. I am very

sensitiv about bein put to extry werk fer nothin Bug Eye an if I do not take it out of your hide I hope my name isunt Henry Clay Montgomery.

You are doutless sayin to yerself Bug Eye, Hank can not cum an get me fer this because he is alredy in trubbel, everybudy in the Black Hills is after Hank fer robin the Dedwood Coach an ther is a reward on his hed, an if Hank cums into town after me he will get shot.

Wel that is jest ware you are rong Bug Eye. These Black Hills fellers has cum to ther sences at last an reelize that I am a innisent man. I found out all about that wen I walked into Hen Crick yestedy pushin my buk bord an my horse Wilbur in frunt of me. I was not afrade to walk into Hen Crick Bug Eye, I hav wipped that entire town befor an I can wip them agen, an wel they noe it.

Hen Crick is still full of little short fellers around 6 foot tall, but they is a diferent set of them this time, nobudy recernized me fer the feller that 1nst wipped the entire town.

The 1st thing I see was a handbil stuk on the door of a sloon, heer it is Bug Eye, I tore it down an wil stik it into my leter.

$500 REWARD
for the capture
DEAD OR ALIVE
of the
Hoosier Giant
robber of the Deadwood Coach.
The Hoosier Giant, true name unknown, is about seven feet tall,
very strong, full black beard,
very desperate and dangerous.
Last seen on foot, running toward
Peg Leg. Reward will be paid by . . .

The botom is tore off Bug Eye I dont noe whoo was goin to pay the reward, but nobudy was payin any atenshun to me an I thot I woud hav sum fun so I walked up to sum littel short fellers in a sloon an sed ware is the $500 dolars an whoo is goin to pay it anyway.

1 littel short feller sed ther aint nobudy goin to pay it it is alredy paid. I sed wat do you meen. An he sed the outlaw is already capchered, they hav him in the jale at Peg Leg. An they are goin to hav sum fun with him by havin a trile, an stringin it out as long as they can, insted of hangin him 1st off in the usal way.

I sed a trile, wat is that. An he sed that is a argyment they are goin to hav to see wether they hang this feller or shoot him or wat. It is about ekally devided they sed between hangin an shootin, tho ther is sum talk of bemin the jale with him in it. An I sed it wil serve him rite, an they all sed this is a rite thinkin feller, an they all bot me a drink.

So you see I now hav a very hi standin in the Black Hills Bug Eye an they aint anybudy goin to stand in my way now that I am cumin after your skelp. On the contrairy Bg. Eye I bet they wil all help me wen they heer how bad I hav ben treated.

Yr. Obeedint Servant,

—HANK.

P S I dont noe wich of those littel short robers they took to be me Bug Eye ner whoo it is they hav locked up in the Peg Leg jale. An I dont giv a woop eether, I am jest telin you this to giv you fare warnin that it is not me they have got in jale, ther is no hope Bug Eye that I wil not cetch you an giv you the wipin you deserve. An you had beter stop telin peepul that you are goin to hit me with that ax I heer you are carrin around with you, you wil be sory you sed such things wen I get hold of you. You may be 7 foot 2 inches tall to my even 7 foot, but dont you think fer a minnit I am worrin about that Bug Eye, I hav wipped biger fellers than you are an I wil do it agen.

—HANK.

P S S Nobudy noes yet that the robers made a mistake an left the gold behind wen they robed the Dedwood Coach an ony stole my carpit bag insted. An they dont noe eether that I found the gold afterwerds an hid it. An if you think you are goin to get your ½ of the gold I found by hittin me with a ax you are very badly mistaken. You are goin to hav to take a entirely different attitood Bug Eye an take yer lickin like a man. An after I hav wipped you within a inch of yer life, wy mebbe we wil talk bizness an mebbe

then you will get your ½ of the gold. An not befor. —HANK.

Hen Crick,
August 1878.

DEER BUG EYE,

Wel Bug Eye I hav laffed until I thout I woud split. I hav jest lerned about your rediclus misforchin Bug Eye, an I dont noe wen I hav herd anythin so comickle.

This mornin I was in a sloon in Hen Crick drinkin out of a bottel I had brung in with me, not so mutch becaus I did not like the likker in that sloon as becaus I had plenty likker on my buk bord but no munney in my pockit, an my gold is stil ware I hid it so far as I noe.

Wel Bug Eye wile I stood ther drinkin the Perkins boy cum up, you noe that toe heded boy we fed that time fer about 2 wks an he pritty neer eet us out of hous an home. He sed hello Hank an I sed hello son, an he sed hav you herd wat your old pardner Bug Eye has went an done an I sed no.

He sed Bug Eye has robed the Dedwood Coach an got hisself in jale. I sed no, wen. He sed I dont noe wen he robed the coach but mebbe you hav seen them handbills they got out ofrin a reward on his hed. They call Bug Eye the Hoozer Jint he sed an they have cot him an locked him up at Peg Leg.

Bug Eye shoud not hav done that I sed did you talk to him an ask him wy he did it. He sed yes I talked to Bug Eye an Bug Eye clamed he knew nuthin about it, Bug Eye sed he jest cum down frum Elk Mowntin ware he had been starvin to deth on acct. sum darn pardner he had did not cum back with the grub. An as soon as he landed in town they mobed him an locked him up an ther has ben street fitin ever since to see whoo gets the reward.

I sed wel wat made them think Bug Eye robed the coach. An the Perkins boy sed wel all they new about it was a jint seven foot tall with black wiskers rode in on the busted remanes of the Dedwood Coach the nite it was robed an then made his escape wen they tride to catch him. An Bug Eye is seven foot tal an has black whiskers so mebbe they made a mistake he sed.

Wel Bug Eye with that it cum over me wat has happened. I was the 1 that rode in on the busted coach an you are the 1 they hav put in jale, jest becaus ther is so few medjum size seven foot fellers in the Black Hills that they think both of us is the saim 1. If that dont beet hel Bug Eye. It sernly serves you rite, you should hav staid on Elk Mowntin like we agreed in the 1st plase, an not cum lookin fer me an talkin about axes jest becaus I was delaid a few wks with the grub.

Meenwile I spose I wil hav to think up sum plan to get you out of ther, it woud serv you rite if I went off an left you to your just desserts, but after all you are my pardner Bug Eye an I spose I wil have to do sumthin or it wil cause talk. An as soon as I hav thout up a plan I wil get you out, you jest sit qwitely in the jale Bug Eye an hope fer the best. That is the way it has always ben since we ben pardners Bug Eye, you sittin an hopin an me doin the atchel werk.

I wil cum to Peg Leg tomorrer Bug Eye, I woud cum today ony Wilbur my horse does not feel like it, I wil tel you wat is the matter. You remember Wilbur kep fallin down an I riged the shafs so they woud not let down an I tied Wilbur to them. Wel Bug Eye that werked fine as long as Wilbur was ony lame in 1 leg. But now he has gone lame in 2 legs, an he takes 2 steps then costs along on the shafs fer 2 steps with his feet up, then takes 2 mor steps an so on Bug Eye. I woud not mind that but it has a very pecooler effect on the buk bord, wen Wilbur leens on the shafs the buk bord goes up, an wen he takes his 2 steps the buk bord sags down agen, an so on, an the buk bord begins springin up an down harder an harder until it jerks the hine weels cleen offen the ground. That is all rite fer a wile Bug Eye but it wil ware out the hole arangement if he keeps it up, even if it does not throw the buk bord

cleen off the rode into a canyon like it is lible to.

I think Wilbur does it on perpose Bug Eye, I hav tride wippin him but it does not do any good. So I wil hav to stay over until tomorrer, I hav his leg tied up in lard an raw wisky an he otter be abel to make Peg Leg all rite in the mornin.

Keep a stif uper lip Bug Eye. An dont ferget to choo yer food; I dont want to get you out of jale jest to find you got indijeschin agen an are too week to travel without bein carrid, I am sick an tired of that way of doin bizness.

Yr. Obeedint Servant,

—HANK.

P S Ther is a feller ridin to Peg Leg tonite Bug Eye I wil giv this to him.

Grand Eegil,
Later, 1878.

DEER BUG EYE,

Wel heer I am Bug Eye I hav got as far as Grand Eegil, Wilbur is goin along pritty good on his 3 legs, I wish now I had fixed up both his lame legs wile I was at it insted of jest the 1. I am very curyus to noe wat he coud of done with a compleet set of legs.

Wat I startid out to say is I am delaid Bug Eye, I can not cum to Peg Leg today like I sed I woud. Peepul are stil very mutch stired up heer over the grate coach robery. But now they hav changed ther toon Bug Eye, insted of sayin How can we cetch the Hoozer jint an kil him they are sayin Ware is the gold anyway an how can we lay our hands on it.

They seem to figger Bug Eye that it was you robed the coach all rite Bug Eye, an you did not hav the gold on you so they figger you must hav hid it sum plase, an all they are talkin about is how they are goin to find it an steel it therselves. An they are sayin it must be hid sum plase neer the coach rode between Grand Eegil an Peg Leg.

Now that is hittin to damm close to the atchel facks fer cumfert Bug Eye, the 1st thing we noe sumbudy wil atchelly find that gold an ware wil we be then. So I wil hav to stay heer a day or 2 an keep a eye on the sitchashun, an mebbe moove the gold to sum safe plase. I woud moove it rite now ony I can not think of no plase ware it woud be perfeckly safe.

I spose you are sayin wat is a $1000000 dolars in the Black Hills, wy shoud everbudy be exited about a $1000000 dolars wen they hav a mine in Grand Eegil that turns out severil dozen $1000000 evry day. Wel Bug Eye the reson is that the mor they talk about the gold that was stole off the Dedwood Coach the mor gold they think it was. An now insted of a satchel of gold they are sayin that it was a hooge chest, an werth anyway $10000000 dolars an mebbe $100000000 dolars, an the mor they talk about it, the mor it is werth an the mor exited they get. An they are sayin if you do not beleeve ther was that mutch gold on the Dedwood Coach you can go to Peg Leg an see the hooge jint that it took to carry the gold away. Meenin you Bug Eye. An sum are sayin that it not ony took a feller like you to carry the gold away, but that you atchelly spraned your back doin it. See wat exitement you hav caused Bug Eye with your sposedly grate strenth.

An sum are sayin they had better go to Peg Leg an get you out of jale an torcher you an make you tel ware the gold is. That shoud be a site fer sore eyes Bug Eye, if they finly deside to do that I wil sernly make it a point to be ther an see the fun. But do not worry Bug Eye, if they carry it too far I wil take matters in my own hands an put a stop to it.

Takin it all in all Bug Eye I think I better lay low in Grand Eegil until I see wat is goin to hapen. An as soons I think up a safe plase to put the gold in I wil be perfeckly free to cum an get you out of jale Bug Eye.

Meenwile Bug Eye I hav met the feller that I giv the letter to yesteday, an he sed he took it all rite an giv it to you in the jale. An wen he told me wat you sed wen you red my letter I coud hardly beleeve my eers. Wat kine of a man are you anyway Bug Eye to talk about your own pardner like that. An wat did you meen Bug Eye shakin the bars of your jale

an jumpin up an down an pulin out handfuls of your hare an yellin leeve me out leeve me out I hav got a merder I got to comit.

I am serprised at you Bug Eye your atitood makes me think you hav ben over eetin agen, how meny times do I hav to tel you to be careful about that. I do not think you are actin fer the best, not by no meens Bug Eye, they wil think you are a crazy man an mebbe send you eest to a loonatick hospitel. You woud look good woudent you Bug Eye sitin fer yeers an yeers inside of a crazy asylum lookin out. That is jest ware you wil end up Bug Eye if you do not begin takin my advise.

I wil giv this to the nex feller ridin tord Peg Leg, an I sernly hope it wil hav a soothin effeck on you, an make you act mor like a reesable hoomin bein than you seem to hav ben doin sinse I seen you last.

Yr. Obeedint servant,
—HANK.

In the woods neer Peg Leg,
Middel of the week, 1878.

DEER BUG EYE,

O gosh Bug Eye hel is aflote an the river risin. Fer the last 2 days an nites I hav ben chasin all over the hills around Peg Leg with my sachel of gold under 1 arm an 8 slabs of sow bely under the other arm an the gun I took frum the Injun in 1 hand an my ax in the other hand an a cuppel old peperbox pistels I took away frum a feller in the other hand. My arms an hands is sernly tird Bug Eye. I keep dropin things an hav to stop an pick them up, an evry time I pick 1 thing up sumthin else falls out an it takes hours fer me to get any plase.

I hav ben too kine to you Bug Eye, too darned kine fer my own good, an now I am in danger of my life. That is wat a man gets fer stikin by his pardner these days, wat are we cumin to anyway.

That last letter I rote to you Bug Eye sernly spilled the beens, it was ment to help you out an do good, but you never got it, all that letter did was to get me in trubbel agen Bug Eye, and if I ever get out of this alive I wil go strait home to Single Tree Indianna an be a respeckabel qwuite sitizen never set foot in the Black Hills agen.

I wated around all mornin lissenin to the talk about ware coud the gold be, an watin fer sum feller to ride over tord Peg Leg to take you the letter I had rote. An finly 5 or 6 fellers desided they woud go to Peg Leg an get 1st hand infermashum about you Bug Eye an the robery you done. An as soon as I found out ware they was goin I run out into the street yellin Hay wate are you goin to Peg Leg an they sed yes wat the hel is it to you anyway.

I sed mebbe you wil be sumware around neer the jale in Peg Leg an they sed that is exactly ware we are goin. An I sed then mebbe you wil see my pore pardner an giv him this letter of advise. They sed whoo is your pardner an I sed he is that tal feller they call the Hoozer Jint, they hav got him in jale fer robin the Dedwood coach.

With that they all giv me a very pecooler look Bug Eye, an 1 of them sed hay fellers look heer, heer is the pardner of the stage rober, he probly noes ware the gold is, I bet he has it hisself. An anuther sed I suspishuned him all the time, he is anuther of these jints, an probly the bruther of the 1 that is in jale. An anuther sed take him take him do not let him get away, we wil make him coff up the gold if we have to bern him. An he rode his horse around back of the rest, mebbe he was afrade they woud be atacked frum behine.

Wel Bug Eye 1 of them puled out a cuppel of peper box pistels an sed stik up your hands you big horse drop that gun. An I steped a littel closer to him an pertended to put up my hands, an I brot the gun barl down on his hed Bug Eye an he fell like a stuned ox. I cot him as he fel off his horse an held him up in frunt of me an backed agenst a log bildin an took his peper box pistels away frum him.

1 of the others sed stop wate dont shoot fellers you will kill Walt, an anuther sed to hel with Walt an puled out his gun. An I

fired that darn peper box pistel at him Bug Eye an like to broke my rist, but it brot him down all rite, he fel off his horse, not ony him but anuther feller. I dont noe ware they was hit but I gess they was hit with athority becaus as soon as they hit the ground they scrambled onto ther hands an gnees an went skuttlin under a buk bord, an I did not heer no mor out of them. Ther is worse guns than peper boxes Bug Eye tho it is a gamble wat they wil hit wen you fire them.

I sed up with yer hands an they put them up too, an a croud gethered around out of the sloons sayin wats up wats up an ever time a new batch cum up I woud make them put up ther hands an stand qwitely, an they all stood rite in ther tracks but 1 feller that puled up a gun an I shot him in the arm an he went off down the street hollerin bluddy merder, an I did not see no mor of him eether. An anuther feller broke an run an I shot him in the leg an it was comickle to see him sittin ther in the street with his hands up an his mouth open lookin as silly as ever I see.

Ther was 2 or 3 sloon winders in range acros the street but I shot 1 or 2 of them out Bug Eye an after that no 1 cum to look out of them or shoot at me, I gess they thot it woud not be a good idee, an in a littel wile ther was so meny fellers standin around me with ther hands up nobuddy coud hav shot me anyway Bug Eye I was a safe man. An after that I did not hav no mor trubbel excep 1 feller clum on a roof with a carbin an I had to bring him down, an anuther feller tride to shoot frum between the gnees of a feller that had his hands up. But they fixed him Bug Eye, they kicked him behine the eer an they all yelled dont shoot dont shoot we wil stand on him insted.

Wel Bug Eye we stood ther qwite a wile, wile I figgered out wat I woud do next, an ware I woud put the 300 or 400 fellers I had cetched. An finly I made them all turn ther backs an stand fasin the side of a log sloon as close as they coud pack.

Then I walked over to ware Wilbur stood harnessed to the buk bord, an I cut his harness off an sed Wilbur you are a free horse. An I cut him loose frum the shafs, an he fel down, an looked serprised, an I sed goodby Wilbur.

Then I took the 8 slabs of sow bely under my arm an my gun an my pistels an walked qwitely out of town. An the severil 100 fellers may hav stood agenst that sloon all day fer all I noe Bug Eye, but they are not standin ther now, becaus they are all swarmin over the hills armed to the teeth lookin fer your pore pardner.

Wel Bug Eye I had not no mor than got outside of town wen heer cum Wilbur, an he has follered me ever sinse. An I walked all the way down heer to neer Peg Leg an dug up my $1000000 dolars, or watever amt. it is Bug Eye, an ever sinse then I hav ben dodgin around in the woods lookin fer a safe plase to hide the gold or ware I can set down fer a minnit without bein routed out. An warever I turn Bug Eye ther is a lot of fellers after me, and I am gettin tird of it.

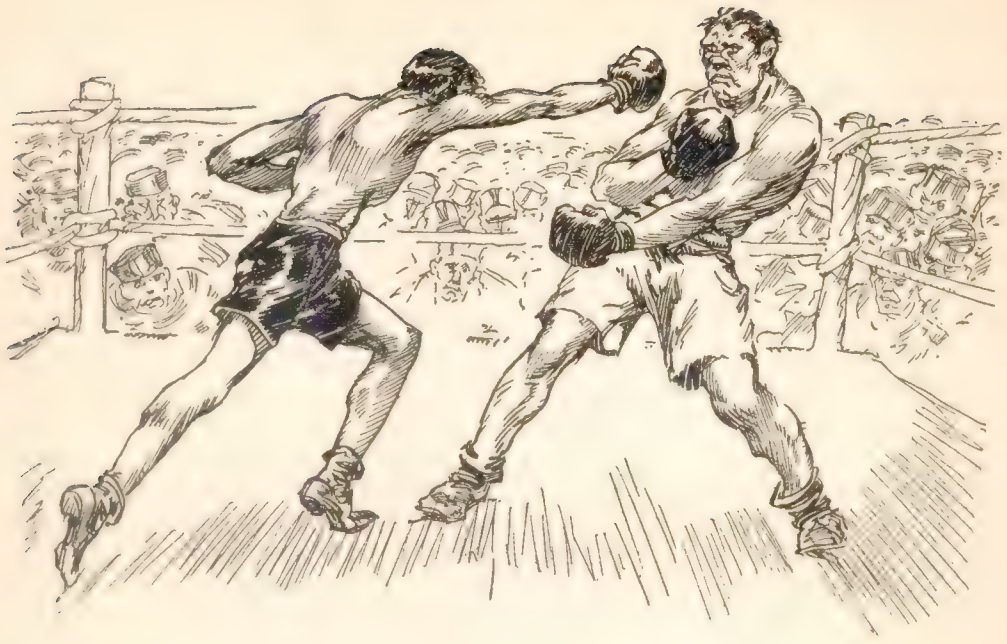
It is dark at last Bug Eye an heer I am restin an ritin you this. An I hope you wil cum to no harm becaus I am delaid agen. An I do not noe how I wil get this to you Bug Eye, but I am settin beside the coach rode in the dark, an mebbe sum persnal frend wil cum along, an if I does I wil giv him this letter fer you so you wil noe how things stand.

I wil say Bg. Eye that Wilbur has ben a invalyble help today, he follered me throo thick an thin, crashin throo the woods an falin down an gettin up agen, an I coudent drive him off. An evry time a passel of fellers herd the crashin they woud cum runin, an I woud duck down, an then they woud say O chucks it is ony sum old broke down horse, an then they woud go away agen without suspishunin anythin.

I am very hard pressed Bug Eye, how wil it all end.

Yr. Obeedint servant,

—HANK.



A SHOW *for the* ROMANS

Two Pugilists in a Prison Camp

By CHARLES TENNEY JACKSON

THE COWBOY Congressman from the Third District and the captain of the State road camp watched the file of dusty men in gray stripes coming from the barbed wire bullpen to climb up along the foot of the towering cañon wall beyond the cottonwoods which marked the bed of the Altemas River. Deveny, the kidding young gang guard, had stopped the fifth prisoner in the line and drawn him aside.

"So that big hulk is Mike Gannon?" grinned Cowboy Bob. "Cap, your intentions are good, but I fear for this fight show you're planning for the Senator. That gorilla'll murder College Kelly."

"Not with Butch in the ring with 'em," said Captain Jenkins. "We promised a parole to the winner, and Kelly's due for it. The job now is to haze Gorilla Gannon into fightin' at all. I told Deveny to get the mob workin' on him. Run him ragged, make him sore—rub it into him about that Juarez fight. You remember? Eleven years ago when them two went thirty-one rounds till a Mexican chief o' police stopped it."

"It must have been bad if a greaser chief stopped it," murmured Congressman Phelps, "and it broke Kelly's fighting heart, didn't it? He was coming on, the fastest heavy in the lot. Smashed him—"

"He's got his chance for revenge,"

grunted Jenkins. "Deveny's gettin' the Gorilla sore the last week, baitin' him. Watch 'em now."

Past the wired stockade they saw the grinning guard dance and shadow box in front of the man in stripes who towered above him.

"Listen, bo!" Deveny was jeering. "You goin' to let this parlor boxer git away with it? Kelly, with a nice soft job in the commissary, and you on the rock pile? You know what Kelly's sayin'?"

The big prisoner had tried to walk around his tormentor to follow the others into the white dust that arose from the rock crusher under the shadow of the Altemas gorge. Then he turned sullenly, his one good eye narrowing under the broken vizor of his gray cap. The other, round and staring, seemed fixed on the piney ridge far up the cañon against the blue.

Mike Gannon never could control that eye—a gift from Mr. Kelly. His ears were brown, stringy rosettes against his close shaven skull. More favors from College Kelly long ago. His broken yellow teeth showed between ridged, thickened lips, further tokens that Kelly had left him to bear lifelong.

The cowboy Congressman, grinning under the six gallon hat that he wore when he came West to his constituents, saw the Gorilla lean toward the guard, and Deveny stepped back fingering his holster nervously. Something about this fellow made every one, in the bullpen or out, hesitate when they had gone just so far. He gave one the idea that if he ever went on the rampage neither bullets nor ropes would stop him, nor the wired gates hold his charge.

Deveny went on more cautiously:

"Listen, Mike. A parole for the winner, and the collection they take might be two hundred. A good road stake for you to travel on. You see, the boss wants to put on this show for this here Eastern Senator when he comes to look over the water-power project. It's up to him if they get the Federal money, and he's a fight fan. You got a chance to do something fer your country, and walk a free man down the Altemas trail, see?"

THE GORILLA'S eye lingered on the free high skyline above Altemas cañon. Then he stepped closer and his husky tones came. There was a torn cartilage in his throat, so that he never could articulate well since that thirty-one rounds with Kelly at Juarez.

"Kelly says he licked me that time? Collars and Cuffs Kelly—says they had to stop him from killin' me at Juarez—Kelly says that?"

His flat dust caked nostrils dilated. His paunchy waist drew in. The long hairy arms shifted and his shoulder arose in vast ridges, the old defensive crouch with which, for fifteen years about the Coast clubs and training camps, Gorilla Mike Gannon had worn out the hands and souls of better men. A chopping block, a human punching bag, a mass of tough meat and sinew in the old days when Gannon was plodding up.

Up? He never got up! He never got anywhere. He never even knew, in all his fighting days, that promoters and managers were kidding him, using him for their clever men to blind and smother in hurricanes of punches, as he stood weaving on his short huge legs in mid ring, unable to stop anything. The dancing boxers had cut his face to ribbons, mauled his ears to tiny warts, choked him in blood—and laughed at him. Old stuff, that. You might scan the sporting records back to days when Bat Nelson and Joe Gans fought at Goldfields and never find a line on the Gorilla's obscure work.

The gun guard backed away nervously again. The smell of the disinfectants on Gannon's faded stripes, his brown, broad face with the flaring nose and little animal ears, hardly a neckline showing down to his sloping shoulders, his long arms dangling—men feared what was behind this granite mask of a face. Not quite in the human mold, they thought. Solitary and hostile, he slogged through the work on the new motor road up the Altemas

cañon; feared and alone he moved through the wired stockade where they had sent him for throwing a swindling timekeeper, on the last timber job where Gannon had worked, down a railroad grade. The judge had taken one look at the Gorilla and called it deadly assault and twelve months.

Well, it wasn't so different on the chain gang. Gannon had seen other work camps. In the years since the fight game died on the Coast he had been a moocher around border towns, a bindlestiff on the road, working now and then in fruit orchards and construction camps, and hardly a sporting man in the bright young cities of the Southwest could recall his name.

DEVENY jeered again lightly.

"Well, buddy, the office force says you can't do nothin' with Collars Kelly. Jest as fast now as he was when he laced you at Juarez."

"What's Collars in the camp fer?"

"He raised a bad check and passed it. Got two years. But he'll talk himself out quick, buddy. He won't stand thirty days on his time. He'll box some poor stiff fer the Captain's show and walk out with a pocket o' jack. Some birds has all the luck."

The Gorilla listened gravely. His cocked eye closed under the fringe of brown nodules that had once been lacerated flesh. Deveny went on with his garrulous, pointed chatter:

"A gentleman, Kelly is. He was the first o' them college amachoors who stepped out among the heavies. Mike, all a man needs now is a line o' highbrow stuff to go ten rounds to a decision and be champion o' the world, mebbe. The kind o' boys who always could make a joke o' you, didn't they now?"

The big man stepped around the guard and shambled on up to the road gang in the dust. Deveny came grinning back to the boss and Congressman Phelps, the cowboy statesman.

"I think mebbe I got under his hide now. I passed the word in the mess house and all to keep raggin' the Gorilla. He'll fight."

"It's a damn' funny thing," pursued Congressman Bob to the State camp captain, "but Senator Frary is a fight fan. Senator Edmund Frary, the friend of the President, the chairman of the committee that has this waterpower development bill in charge—a scholar, a blue blood New Englander who's got the fate of this project in his hand. He can throw seventy millions to our proposition here on the Altemas, or favor that power site over on the Tavatari; so you see what I'm here for, don't you? Send this old mandarin away with a good time on his junket and it'll count a lot."

Jenkins grunted. Bob Phelps had been in Congress two terms and he ought to know Washington's ways. A nod from the weary old statesman could build a vast white dam across this wild little river and make the Altemas Valley blossom like a rose, could it?

And he was a follower of the prize ring, discreetly, ever since his Harvard days, was he? The bullet headed camp captain grumbled on to Deveny, the guard.

"Well, keep after Gannon. Ride him hard. But this ain't no place for a scholar and a gentleman. Bob, you got a damn' nerve, steerin' this Senator on to us fer entertainment."

It was no way to address a Congressman, but Jenkins had helped put cowboy Bob under the great white dome.

"The Senator'll like it. He's fed up on receptions and ballyhoo. The Tavatari folks gave him a barbecue and a rodeo. He nearly threw a meat fit, and he don't care for cows and riders. He's just finished a two volume critical history of Rome and he wants a holiday. This seventy million appropriation isn't cat meat to him. He'll favor the project that takes his fancy, and all the expert engineering hokum for either side, or the political considerations, either, won't influence him. This State ain't for his party, anyhow."

"Put the screws to Gorilla Gannon, Deveny," ordered Jenkins. "If he won't

fight, rough him. Got to please this Washington party."

"Butchered to make a Roman holiday," grinned Congressman Bob. "The Senator'll like killin' with a kick to it."

TWO DAYS later Deveny halted Gannon again. The dynamite squad was blasting a shelf along the rock above the rapids, and the men in stripes were leaning on their shovels awaiting the whistle.

"Hi, Gannon? Thought over that fight proposition?"

The Gorilla bent his scowling face closer to the man with the gun. Deveny raised his voice so that all the gang could hear.

"Hell, you're no sport! If you'd come through with Kelly, the camp'd have a field day. No work and extry scoffin's. Raisins in the slum, mebbe. And College Kelly sits around the office tellin' how you just hung on him after the twenty-second round at Juarez. The referee called it a draw after the Mexican chief stopped it to keep Kelly from killin' you!"

The Gorilla eyed him coldly.

"Kelly says that?"

"I leave it to the bunch." Deveny winked at the nearer men. "Ain't it the truth? Silk Hat Kelly sittin' pretty in the office!"

The Gorilla's hard hand came across his torn lips. They saw the snarl he covered. His round head lowered between his shoulders and he shambled on to the rock pile. But he leered and nodded to Deveny.

"All right, bo. I got a fight left. Tell 'em I'll be there."

THE ROAD gang relaxed. For a week they had whispered the tale. Of the hundred and sixty prisoners and the thirty State employees—engineers, camp bosses and clerks—Gannon was the only one who did not realize that he had been badgered and insulted to this end.

Short term men, greasy shovel stiffs gathered in by Old John Law for the constable fees, grinned to one another. Vags from San Berdoo to the crum joints of Seattle's waterfront muttered to mobsters out from the East on their first drag beyond the Mississippi. A one armed blanket man from El Paso said he knew it all when they gathered in the mess house that night.

"I seed that fight! It was afore I come to danglin' up wit' t' dope runnin' over t' Rio Grande. In them days a grand was jes' scoff money to me, an' I was ringside at 'at fight when Collars an' Cuffs Kelly broke his hands out on t' Gorilla's nut. Listen, bo—'at Kelly was a comer then! Gee Cri's, 'at lad made you think o' Jim Corbett at his best!"

The gang had heard this stuff before. But they listened while glances went down the mess bench to where the hairy hand of Gorilla Gannon was reaching for the black molasses to slough over his last hard bread. If he heard he made no sign out of his sullenness.

"Damn'," sighed the one arm stiff, "t'ese ten round scrappers neve' saw mixin' like it. A gen'lman—'at was Kelly then. College heavyweight come outa th' amachoors—comin', too. Right on, ripe fer Willard afore Dempsey got 'im. Whatever some bughouse manager eve' let a white lad like Collars Kelly cross the river to a finish fight wit' a bull like Gannon fer, I dunno. Thirty-one rounds, his hands broke, his eyes full o' th' blood spatterin' from Gannon's mug! Crips, th' Gorilla weavin' round blind, too, not knowin' if Kelly was behind or before him. But he couldn't laid gloves on Kelly if he'd had eyes in the back o' his neck. Like that—in that Mexican sun—two hours mebbe, till the greaser harness bull stopped it. Draw, they said."

"Heerd it broke the spirit out o' Colledge Kelly?"

"Yeah. He went on the bum. Hadn't a bone in his hands that'd ever stand a rap after he cut th' Gorilla into cat meat 'at time. Jes' faded. Now he's in clink fer a bad check, is he?"

The shadowy striped gang moved stealthily. From the other end of the

table the huge hulk of a man had arisen and gone to the dusk between the bunkhouse and the bullpen wires.

HE HEARD the last of the Winger's tale as he stood in the white dust staring at the spangle of stars over the Altemas divide. The dope dangler cackled on with his Juarez saga.

"Grudge, that's what it was atween them two. Hate an' grudge sent Collars Kelly over the line where they could fight a finish. They'd mixed before—jes' six an' ten goes. I'd heard it all at Spider's in Frisco—long before. They was usin' Gannon them days to work the fast boys out on—he never could hit none o' 'em—they all give him the laugh them days. Somepin must been between 'em—somepin to send a boxer like College Kelly into a Mexican dump fer a finish go with th' Gorilla. Gawd, think what that lad might been with the million dollar splits they git now fer ten rounds trippin' to a decision! Broke the soul o' him out on Gorilla Gannon!"

Gannon's long arms were on the wires. He saw, with his one good eye, the little lights down at the main camp.

Might have gone on; might be world's champion now? College Kelly, the white laughing one! The Greek god—that's what fool women once said of him. The Gorilla was wondering dully whether he hated. Does the tiger hate the deer under its teeth? Hardly. Gannon hadn't thought of that. Hate? Well, it must have been Collars Kelly who hated. Kelly must hate now, then. All these bitter years a broken man. Surely he hated now!

Well, that explained it. Explained what Deveny and Captain Jenkins meant. Kelly down there, jeering and nagging, reviling the memory of the man who had ruined him.

And some slow implacable fury arose in Gannon's heart. All those years they'd been laughing at him, had they? He'd never understood it clearly before. Thought it was friendly joking.

Why should that dazzling, shifting white shadow, Kelly, hate him? He could never knock Gannon out, that must be it. No one had ever knocked Gannon out. None, in all his fighting years, had ever knocked him down.

In the old days he was wont to reel like a bloody column around the ring, blinded breathless, swinging his grotesque long arms, trying to wind them about his enemy, clutching at air—going on, groping here and there, till the gongs made them quit.

That had been the Gorilla's career. He had never got the decision from any man. He had pawed and wrestled and smashed one or two unlucky ones down. It had to be called a knockout then.

So Kelly hated him, had hated him all these long losing years? College Kelly. Collars and Cuffs, the dude of old Frisco days. Kelly, the laughing beautiful lad who, time and again, in the short bouts while he was rising through the ruck, had stung and lacerated Gannon's face, like all the rest, using the Gorilla for a wonderful bloody show till the blood lust crowds were sickened on it.

THE GORILLA, alone under the stars, was rubbing the back of his hand across the eye that Kelly had cut up till it had never matched the other one. The silent mob at the mess bench heard his husky mumble. But no man tried to make out the words.

"Used to call me names, kiddin' at me. Kelly'd wear out himself an' hang on to me. Us't' lay his head by my ear an' grin at me. Stuff outa books it was. Called me Spartycuss; kiddin' me along, tryin' to git my mind off my work and finish me. Try to int'rust me in somethin' and whip one over while I was thinkin'. Yeah, that was Kelly. He'd oughta been champion, too."

He dwelt heavily on that. He sure thought Kelly would be champion in those days. Kelly had everything. A lion's courage. A cold, merciless brain. A deadly kick in either hand, the weight, the reach, the beautiful timing and coordination of nerve and mind and muscle.

Four times they had fought over the short route till that fatal day at Juarez, and always Collars Kelly got the decision.

But Juarez—that was something else. Why did Kelly do it? Gorilla Gannon blinked at the camp lights.

"None of 'em ever put me down—always on my feet—fightin'."

Old days came back as he stood by the bullpen wires, fat, heavy, old. Kelly, let's see, now? Kelly would be ten years younger.

Kelly never was a bum. Kelly must have cared for himself. Kelly never knew flophouses, handouts, hunger, cold. Gorilla Gannon dwelt heavily on that last fight and the others. He recalled how College Kelly used to slide easily inside his swings when the boxer wanted to rest. He would lay his head on the Gorilla's hairy shoulder and begin that mocking singsong to Gannon's bleeding ear.

"Fight? Who told you you could fight, Adonis? Old Spartacus. . . . Horatius at the Bridge. . . . Leonidas at Thermop. . . look out, Gorilla! Going to break—hit me now!"

That had been it. Book stuff. But the mocking weary face hung before him inviting the Gorilla's swing. He would swing to empty air. The shadow was dancing away, and then would come the penalty that Gorilla Gannon always paid, for listening a second to book stuff. Kelly's deadly left into his pulp of a face.

No use. Kelly flitting away and Gannon roaring like a bull. Then, in the next clinch, it would come again. Kelly resting his head on the Gorilla's breast and gasping his lingo:

"Adonis, the caveman—look out in the break—this one is for your left lamp, Gorilla! The right's closed now, isn't it?"

And with Collars' jeering laugh would come the crushing glove into his other optic. Gannon didn't know. He couldn't help it. He never learned any defense against the worst of them. He pawed forward like a bear, taking them like solid shot into a vast cheese.

ONLY, at Juarez, it had been different. It took Gannon years to comprehend how different, to reflect upon what incredible insanity ever persuaded Kelly's handlers to let him cross the Rio Grande to try a finish fight with his ancient punching bag.

"He might 'a' been champeen now," grunted Gannon heavily at the wires. "The damn' fool, what was eatin' 'im then? He couldn't git me. After the twenty-second he lays there on me, stallin'; done all he could and there I was. Yeah, I was cut. Him and me wrastled so close that the blood sucked up and down between his belly an' mine. Like a suck pump—you could hear it. The canvas was gummy yards around. Blood was on the ropes and posts. I slipped in it when I gits outside the ring—my blood! Kelly wasn't cut—just wore out—hugged—wrastled to where he couldn't lift a glove. But his hands busted—I neve' knew that then—both hands busted and him grinnin', kiddin' at me. That damn' referee didn't do nothin'. Sure not. Kelly carried the wise money. They couldn't give me no break unless Kelly was knocked out, so the Mexican jumped in to save the gamblers' jack—draw they called it."

He thought of Juarez again and grumbled:

"Hate him? Where'd dees guys git 'at stuff? He'd ought to been champeen—only me—I stopped him. He'd dropped in 'at last fight only I held him on his feet. Yeah, dropped, dog tired—gone—only I held him up 'at last round—fought out."

He didn't know why he had done that. Only he had got to thinking dumbly. Kelly was a youngster; Kelly ought to have gone far.

In the years since, as a bindlestiff over the West, Gannon had thought, now and then, of College Kelly. Of all the fast men he had fought for flop money and eats around the California clubs he remembered none save Collars and Cuffs, who had that insolent trick of trying to divert his mind with some highbrow talk

till he could whip over the knockout as the Gorilla studied it out.

Well, it never had worked. Mr. Aloysius Burke Kelly's university years had never got him a thing with Mike Gorilla Gannon. A Greek root hissed into Mike's flat ear had never won the roar of the crowd as did Kelly's gymnasium trained uppercut; nor a line from Paracelsus brought the blood lusted mob howling to its feet as did Kelly's right, punch after punch, into Gannon's raw face.

The Gorilla had been used to that. Just bobbing around on his heavy feet trying to see the cluster lights. Always on his feet! That must have been what maddened young Kelly—gentleman adventurer, scholar, prince of the amateurs in old Coast days.

Gannon remembered now what he had read after the Juarez fight, skipping all words over two syllables. A great fighter destroyed to make a gamblers' holiday. The fastest big man coming up to challenge for the heavy crown, fallen just this side the goal. The Gorilla hadn't meant that, he morosely thought. He was no finicky moralist, but he had never laid down on a fight. Maybe it was because nobody ever offered him the price. The fast boys didn't need to. They could always win on points over him.

But a finish, well, Juarez had been different! But even then Gannon had won nothing. He had no friends. All he had ever looked upon from the ring was a blood hungered, cat calling horde, howling for the fast boys to put him away. But even Kelly, the best of the white bodied beautiful young men, couldn't do it.

THE GANG guards prodded the Gorilla more insolently than usual the next few days. They delayed him from his meals, badgered him with dirty little jobs about the bunkhouse. His fellow prisoners, as far as they dared, kept up the persecution.

He went through work and rest hours a sullen brute, his huge tired body shoving away lesser men on the rock pile, slumping down at the mess table to stow away the slum, hard bread, black molasses and the stuff the State called coffee. The surveyors and engineers got to watching him through the wires and kidding with Captain Jenkins, who had to act as official host for the patrician New England Senator tomorrow. Cowboy Bob Phelps and his Western hat listened to Deveny's report on progress.

"We got him raw—inside. He don't say nothin'; but, mister, you'll see blood and sand. We told him everything—that Kelly hates him, that Kelly brags he'll knock him cold in three rounds. He ain't human, Cap. Two guns on me and I don't let the Gorilla pass behind my back. How's Kelly comin' on for the scrap?"

"Kelly thinks Gannon is all through. Fat and old. And Kelly's lived straight. He was married, and his wife died. Got a kid, too. He was runnin' a garage down in the lower Altemas Valley. Owns his own home there. You see, if this Senator throws his influence to develop the Altemas, Kelly's place will triple in value like all the land down there. You see, Kelly has something to fight for apart from a parole and the purse. He'd never got in this jam, only he was in bad with his bank and raised a check to cover it. The judge was easy on him. He belongs to some lodges, and that helped. Two years is all he got. A good scout, Kelly is."

"A nervous, highstrung bird," mused Congressman Bob. "They tell me he'd been champion of the world long ago if he hadn't broke his heart and hands on the Gorilla."

"Well, he can get Gannon now. I told Kelly he'd have to knock Gannon out to get this parole. You said the Senator'd like it that way, didn't you, Bob?"

"Sure. You see the old boy wrote that history of the ancient civilizations to prove that they all fall because the brute type of man climbs up and puts down the mental type. Get me, Cap? He says America will go the same way in a thousand years. He says we exalt the brute now, just as Rome did in its decay. The barbarians played setback with the world,

and they will again. The Senator points to our mobs in the cities—millions of men, women and children howling about the fight bulletins and the radios, to show where we're heading with our glorification of the beast. So he haunts the big fights to watch his theory work out."

"Yeah?" grunted the captain. "I'll bet he loves the smack of a glove. I told Kelly what he's fightin' for. But Gannon —that bum ain't got the mind of a rat. Puttin' on a show for them Romans, as you call it, don't make no hit with the Gorilla."

"Wait," mused Bob Phelps, "till Kelly cuts him up. He'll fight. I had a talk with Kelly. He's a bright bird, even now. He's got the idea for this show. In great shape, too. His hands ain't brittle now, he says. He never saw Gannon since that day in Juarez. Kelly and I went to arguing the Senator's philosophy of history. Kelly brought up that old story we had in school. Spartacus to the gladiators—"

"Who?" said Jenkins. "Must been a wop or a dago—"

"A trained fighter of the Roman arena who refused to do his stuff for the aristocratic senators. Instead, he got all the gladiators to rebel. They damn' near upset the government."

"Must have had a squawk over the gate money," retorted the camp boss. "Well, my boys ain't got any holler comin'. They fight, or go solitary with their privileges taken away, see, Bob?"

THE TWO press association men who rode up the half built motor road of the upper Altemas Valley, in the wake of the official State car bearing Senator Edmund Frary on this Western junket, agreed that the other folks in the Tavatari had done much better in entertaining the President's friend.

The Senator, in fact, while courteous and attentive to the pleas of the rival waterpower promoters, was noncommittal, as, of course was right, till he got back to Washington. But when the State secretary's party stopped the official car at the end of the Altemas cañon road and Senator Frary saw the glitter of wires beyond the cottonwood flats he resigned himself patiently to another rodeo. All he had made out of the last one was a yelling mess of men and cattle.

But when the lean, burned camp officers and engineers greeted him he saw that the animals behind the wires were human stock. It interested him briefly; then he was taken about and told the facts and plans of the Altemas Valley boosters, and later to dinner under a cottonwood pole shelter near the quarters.

His anxious hosts thought it would be cooler there. What they saw was a worn weary little man with a short gray beard, in baggy plus fours and plaid cap, whose eyes closed as he listened. Congressman Bob did his best for his district, and the state engineers did all they could. But Senator Frary had seen the West many times—from observation car windows. And politically, economically, it didn't make a whoop's difference to him which one of these mountain rivers got the Federal improvements. Tavatari had more white collars and Altemas more deer flies. The Senator was glad when the boosters finished their speeches, and Jenkins, the camp boss, announced that now his boys would hold a field day to honor the President's friend.

Muscle bound, hoarsely croaking men who quarreled about their own umpires and timekeepers—as a field day this was terrible. Even six shotgun guards wandering around the ruck of prisoners, cursing ominously under their breath, couldn't get action, enthusiasm, pep into these contestants.

Cowboy Bob told Captain Jenkins it was fierce. If this were the best the State camp could do they shouldn't have done anything. It was two hours of plumb, unrelieved boredom for everybody, until the sun was sinking to the high sere scraggy rim of the cañon beyond the dam site.

"Jim," gasped Congressman Bob, "get that gang of shovel stiffs off the field. How about that boxing show you prom-

ised? The old boy is trying to be pleasant, but he keeps shutting his eyes. Say, this kind of thing will hurt me in Washington. I got bills in conference that Frary will look at with a fishy smile when he remembers how we roughed it for him up the Altemas. Get busy—"

IN THAT dusty space between the wire stockade and the river, gray striped men were dragging away the hurdles and hauling forth a bumpy canvas mat. They jammed poles down into the dirt and strung ropes to it. The State secretary whispered to the news association men as Butch Digger, the road foreman, walked out to the field and bawled at his helpers.

"Is that right about the Senator being a bug for the boxing game?" asked the secretary. "If it is we got—"

"What you got?" jeered the scribes. "We'll say you haven't!"

"If the Senator used to be strong for old Jawn L., maybe he'll enjoy our two—"

"He won't. He's fed up now. Better start him for town. You people aren't making any hit with this Altemas project. He's too tired to listen to facts and figures. Hey, who's that in the corner?"

"Did you ever hear of College Kelly?" asked the State secretary a bit proudly. "Well, we got him."

The newspaper men were younger, but one of them thought a moment.

"Oh, yes—back in the days when Joe Gans and Bat Nelson hooked up at Goldfields—when they were fighting at Colma south of the Slot in San Francisco—Gosh, when thirty thousand dollars was top price for the big boys, too."

"Not long, except in the fight game," grunted the other. "Collars and Cuffs Kelly! Sure, I remember. What you mean *got him?*"

"There he is," said Congressman Bob eagerly. "We got Mike Gannon—the Gorilla, they called him. Did you ever hear what happened at Juarez? These same two birds . . ."

THE AGED Senator had opened his eyes. These younger men—politicians, engineers, reporters and gunmen—had got into a wrangle just below his seat of honor. Strangely enough, he had been forgetting this petty waterpower squabble a moment by dwelling upon a passage in his "Interpretation of Roman Decline." In a way he had sentimentalized the picture. The dainty Roman senators crowding under the silken hangings about the arena to bet their sesterces upon the giant slaves from Sparta, the Nubian wastes, Parthia or the lands of the Gaul—brawny men sent to the slaughter with the beasts out on stirred, bloody sand.

The Senator must have nodded, for he came to with a start.

The desert sun was low on yellow sands below him. Grouped men were there, also. And a silence had come from rock to rock of the towering black walls along the river. Even the ribald newspaper men had stopped kidding the cowboy Congressman.

The Senator sat higher in his dirty camp chair. Around the ring out there were groups of men in stripes, crouched to watch as he now was watching.

Every one was nervously tense except the Eastern correspondents who, after one interested look at the outfit, began their low chatter down under the edge of the grimy bunting that adorned the hot pine planks of the guest pavilion.

"The Senator's gone by-by," said Murchison. "Well, the poor old boy's tired out—don't blame him. Say, Jim, I been six thousand miles with him and I know his mind. He's fed up on this Altemas proposition, after the rest of it. Now when we get down to town tonight I'm going to file my stuff to this effect. Listen, the chairman of the waterpower special committee favors Tavatari—"

The cowboy Congressman overheard this. He horned right into conference.

"Go to hell, Murch!" he grumbled playfully but anxiously. "The Senator listened to every word of my speech. The great Altemas Valley, in years to come, a land flowing with milk and honey—"

The correspondents yelped in chorus:

"Gosh, come again. He's heard that! A land rolling with bilk and money, you want it to be—"

The Senator closed his eyes. He was too seasoned a campaigner, as well as a philosopher, to rebuke these irreverent makers of political reputation with the public. But now his young secretary, a Rhodes scholar wishful to become a career diplomat, put in a startled query down there under the platform.

"My word! What is that?" Young Hadley pointed to Gorilla Gannon, who had just come past the squatting convicts on the sand.

"Jenkins' pet. Baby doll o' the Sierras—"

"He won't like that sort of thing!" gasped the secretary.

"Thought he wanted a fight?" grunted Jenkins sourly. "The thing was rigged just to entertain him. A boxing show—"

"That's the inside stuff on the Senator back East," asserted Bob Phelps. "I got the tip he always follows the ring scraps."

"Oh, yes, indeed!" cried Mr. Hadley. "Boxing is his secret hobby. But this—but that—I don't believe it'll be the thing."

They all looked at Gannon, who had climbed through the ropes. Captain Jenkins provided no ring robes for his pets. The guests saw the brown shine of flesh, where the Gorrilla's hairy breast and limbs let the sun strike it. He went to his corner with a heavy footed slouch, sat down, lowered his head and watched, his one round eye staring vacantly, the other narrowed to a slit.

"Cat meat," murmured one of the newspaper men, "that's all he ever was. I don't suppose it will be pretty. Bob, your people up here are making another mistake. This isn't boxing you'll have."

"Some damn' fool on the committee said the Senator liked it raw. I'd found some clever boy to go on with Kelly, but they gave us the hunch to make it mean. And Kelly hates this fellow."

THE NEWSPAPER men laughed. Anyhow, this was some of that stuff that never gets on to the leased wires. Congressman Bob was pointing at the nearer corner over the heads of the crouching convicts on the ground around the arena.

"So, College Kelly's come to this, eh? Champ of a chain gang camp? He doesn't look in bad shape. Only thirty-three now, is he? Wouldn't be a bad little sport story, only the Senator here, and all—"

"Kelly ought to done something years ago. But he was too nervous a type. Too much imagination, too much—you know he has a college degree, don't you, only they found he was heavyweight timber and pushed him into the game. Let's see, now, how long ago?"

The Senator opened his eyes again. Too much imagination? It went back to the thesis of his book on the downfall of the ancient civilizations. He was sorry to conclude his analysis in such a pessimistic tone, but his clear mind had held him to it.

He really had a keen merciless judgment of men, inside and out. Those two out there now? They typified what he was after. This Gorilla, an animal stirred ever so little by intelligence, would crush the other man. Without mercy, kindliness, human love—it was dangerous business causing the brute to think. The genius and the machines of America could not save her in the end, if this thing was kept up. The glorification of the killer, the destroyer. Rome and Greece went to ruin once their thinkers tried to amuse or placate the beast men who did not think.

The Senator was interested in his theory, and this grotesque spectacle would bear him out in its obscure way. It was much greater than this senseless squabble about waterpower sites. Who, east of Denver, cared a rap which river was harnessed? Not Senator Frary of New England. The administration would take his word for it, and as the kidding newspaper men had it, the Senatorial

mind was even-steven about it, depending on who made him the most comfortable on this junket.

The Senator heard those fellows down there betting about this dismal boxing match. He smiled at the young men.

"Three to one," grinned Murchison, "Kelly'll cut Gannon blind. It's always been that way. A big chunk of cheese. A lump—no brains. And his hulk kept him on his feet eleven years ago, but it can't now. Watch this pretty baby. Kelly's not old; he's lived right. He's got everything to win."

The Senator smiled cynically. He watched the picture out there. The black rock walls, the foaming little river, the cottonwood flats—the wired stockade and the camp headquarters between which was the ring with its squatting spectators and the armed guards. He heard the jeers that greeted the hairy morose savage, and the shouts for Kelly, the trained killer of old ring days.

There was no doubt where sympathy lay. Camp bosses, guests, convicts—all for the keen, courageous white bodied man who was watching his ancient enemy with the eager vitality of a tiger ready to spring.

They all got that message from Kelly. Freedom, a stake to clear out of this sordid camp, back to rebuild himself again.

"It means something to him," said Bob to Murchison. "If he's got half his old stuff, Gannon won't know East from West for the gloves flying before his face. Look at Gannon—must be past forty. Fat—no wind. Nothing to go with."

The Gorilla sat patiently with his huge gloved paws on hairy knees. The sun in his eyes. They had given him the worst corner. He must be half blind, anyhow.

JENKINS looked up at the Senator under the awning and grumbled. The camp boss wished he hadn't framed this. Big joke, this fight. The younger men all began to whisper about Gannon. No condition, nothing for him but to stand and take it. The Senator wouldn't like it.

Senator Frary smiled behind his hand. They were mistaken. He had an academic premise to maintain. Write a book to prove a thing is so and you must insist it's so. So he was slightly irritated at the wisecracking young men. They were deriding his inner judgment. He had no prejudice whatever, but his mind turned to Gorilla Gannon critically.

"The brute," he reflected, and batted a deer fly off his neck, "without soul, feeling or intelligence, once given the dangerous idea that it can think, is utterly destructive in the end. In a finish, it wins. Values of civilization—honor, charity, human love—all phantoms to this type. The Gorilla, now—" he smiled in a fatherly way at the Gorilla.

These two hundred odd men here wanted this clumsy ape stretched red and senseless in the sand, but the Senator had no prejudice about it. When the mess pan gong rang he watched Kelly.

Kelly's lean, set face was unreadable save for cool merciless determination. They all understood that. Something to be finished here, some job left undone for years. Kelly saw his man before him, coming on. The same old gorilla crouch, hairy long arms swinging; one could almost believe that claws were beneath the brown gloves. The snarling face, lips drawn back, the yellow teeth showing, the eyes peering under bristly ridges, the ears crushed and flat as a cat's when it leaps—this was the picture Kelly saw. Something coming to crush and choke and tear.

Kelly didn't wait for the picture to change. That was Gannon of old, swaying on his flat feet, swinging arms, glaring. The boxer rushed and whipped over his left. When he danced away they saw blood vomit from Gannon's nose. The brown man turned to face this shifting body, and Kelly drove rights and lefts to his face and was away.

The chain gang mob was howling now. The honor guests were stirred. Gannon dropped his shaven head, till it seemed sunk between protective ridges of his huge shoulders, his big paws up against

the hurricane of blows upon him. The dancing body lashed right and left, in and out and away, and the Gorilla moved slowly about on his short legs, following. When the gong rang Kelly walked away.

Gannon's heavy face lifted, staring. Old stuff again—within three minutes. Lips, nose, eyes cut, macerated, he went slowly back to his stool, lowered his head and blinked at his towel man.

"Same old stuff," murmured one of the newspaper men idly. "The Gorilla never got anything else, did he?"

The tension relaxed. They all forgot to look at the Senator. This wasn't going to be exactly the thing for a scholar and a gentleman, even one who admired boxing.

The Senator pulled his close gray beard thoughtfully. This white lithe figure out there was of his kind—keen, mental, alive with feeling. Plain to be seen when they were at it again. He was all about Gannon, boring in with so many gloves before the shorter man's face that Gannon merely humped himself and took them. Once he swung, and Kelly came easily inside against his body. Old stuff again. Collars Kelly locked in the vast arms of the Gorilla trying to infight to stomach and kidneys.

GANNON took it all, grunting. The referee pried and bawled at them vainly. Foot by foot the Gorilla marched, shoving his foe before him. When they broke, Kelly cut him right-left, right-left, in the face, before Gannon could cover; and then the weary boxer swung in against the hairy breast.

"You damn' goat!" Kelly was gasping in his ear. "Yes, I'm here again. Listen, Gorilla? I can lick you, if it wasn't for my hands—that day in Juarez, remember—"

Old stuff again. Kelly the kidder. Only this was a different line. Gannon shoved him about, grunting, trying to free his arms. When he moved his arm Kelly tore at his kidneys, and when they parted Kelly uppercut him to his broken teeth. There was a wild look on Kelly's face when the mess pan rang.

"Imagination," thought Senator Frary, "and the Gorilla lacks it entirely. A mere ruthless savage who has been given a dangerous glimmer of mentality. The brute, coming up to destroy—"

The patter of Kelly's shoes on the bloody canvas stopped his cogitations. Kelly, moving like a shadow about the slow figure, whipping in punches like the darts of a snake's head.

If Gannon had been slow in the old days, he was worse than ever now. Nothing but to come on in his crouch and take them.

Men began to growl that this sure was the old stuff again; all they had ever heard about these two enemies.

The Gorilla swaying on, a bleeding column of flesh, and Collars Kelly tearing at him like a young eager dog mad with the taste of it. Gannon swung now and then in the lapses of the other man's attack—swung to the air, Kelly either in or outside, with that malicious grin that was becoming fixed and white.

Collars slipped inside again, and they wrestled across the mat. Gannon caught the sobbing whisper of a weary man at his flat ear.

"Listen, you stiff. I could cut hell out of you, so's you couldn't see nor hear nor know anything. I did it, Gannon. Say, whoever told you you could fight—Spartacus? Old handsome Hal! Adonis—"

"Who the hell? Listen, Kid, rest yerself—"

Kelly snarled at him.

"Look out, now! This one—your bum lamp!"

Gannon took it there as they broke. That was the old way. Kelly naming the punch and then nailing it. Old joke, old stuff; and nobody knew save these two locked and whispering. Kelly with his mocking college patter and then wicked punches.

The Gorilla saw him now again through a misty red spray from his cut brows. Kelly, dancing, weaving, but with that

haggard despair that he had at Juarez, his brittle hands breaking in the steamy gloves. Gannon went forward with ferocious swings till he enveloped his man against the ropes. The referee heaved to his side and Gannon's elbow doubled him up.

"Yeah," grunted Gannon. "Break, you dancin' fool! Gone, ain't you? Here, see this—" he thrust his left in a short hook to Kelly's stomach and swung his body closer in a hug—"see that? When I can hook 'em to you I know you're gone. Get away now!"

Kelly broke again. He whirled and drove a right straight to Gannon's one eye. The big man weaved on his feet, his hands down.

THEY were howling out there. On their feet yelling so that the black gorge echoed with it. Senator Frary watched with critical interest. First to the fighters, then to the yelling mob.

Kelly was storming the brown man with all he had. Gannon had buckled for a moment under that right. Kelly struck between the pawing gloves that Gannon raised awkwardly to his eyes, as if trying to see what was before him. The howling became higher, and then the Gorilla wound an arm about his foe again.

They were both twisting, slippery with Gannon's blood. Some one shouted that this ought to be stopped in the presence of the President's friend, the scholar of the arts and letters.

But Jenkins shook his head to Butch, the referee. Kelly was to get his freedom on a knockout. Nothing more he had promised. Gannon was helpless; he'd not stand another round.

Butch walked away from them futilely. They could hammer and claw in the clinches; anyhow, Gannon was in no shape to take even these tiring short punches to his belly now.

"Off me," grunted Gannon. "Fight—I can't see nothin'. It's Juarez over agin—blinded me—go to it, Kelly—"

"Finish it," whispered Kelly. "Yes, Juarez—my hands broken—same old stuff."

"Break and go to it, you damn' parlor boxer! I fell fer your talk once and you knocked my left eye crooked. Hands, hey?"

The ringside could not hear the gasps as the two weary locked forms reeled on the canvas. They howled for Kelly to put him down. The Gorilla was helpless to attack, surely.

"Get off me," croaked Gannon. "You got it!"

"Isn't no decision," gasped Kelly. "They said you were all in, old, fat. I'd win, but have to knock you out. Oh God, my kid! Home—if I got you!"

The Gorilla shoved him away, snarling So that was it. Kelly had to get him. He bore in against the weak tap of Kelly's glove on his chin. He swung and missed, and Kelly was in his arms again, and the old stumbling walk began.

Referee Butch Digger threw up his hands wearily and gazed at Captain Jenkins. The correspondents began to protest. Young Mr. Hadley of Oxford glanced at his employer. The New England gentleman seemed half asleep as he watched. That little ring was crimsoned as ever Nero could have wished. The spectators were howling as the two gladiators shoved on, breast to breast.

Gannon narrowed his bleeding brows trying to see Kelly's lips by his shoulder.

"Lissen, damn' you. What's 'at? More yer line, Collars—"

"Truth. My kid in the hospital, Tucson. Kid—its mother dead. If I got this parole—you damn' ape, break away!"

"Go on! Hook one over. I'm listenin'. I'd knocked you out in them old short bouts, only I was always listenin' to you."

"Kid, just seven years old, may be dying. It's blood poisoning—and me here in clink."

"Hook one, damn you! I'm listenin' to old stuff—"

"God's truth! Ask Jenkins."

Even Butch, the referee, couldn't make out what all this mumble was about. He was a mighty poor referee, at that.

"Got to win—got to come back—"

The Gorilla shoved him away, blinking at him. And Kelly whipped one over. Right and left, gasping in agony with each sock. Gannon felt the back of the gloves in the mess of his face like the pistons of an engine, but weakening, dying to nothing.

The Gorilla lunged forward again to paw his victim.

"You damn' lyin' kidder! What you mean, sick kid?"

"I was broke. Passed that bad check to get money—kid sick two years. Break, you damned bullnecked ape!"

Gannon glowered at him.

"I held you up once before. Juarez, it was. Thought you had champeen stuff. That last round I held you up, hopin' mebbe yeh'd get through to the big money—and yeh quit!"

THEN he saw Kelly's dangling glove. He could not have told what he had hoped at Juarez, where Kelly was ruined. At the highest it could only have been that Kelly would come through and rise on to the heavyweight crown, and then Gannon could be a friend of his in the glorious days of fame and money.

But now, in this brute bloody ring hidden in a cañon niche, surrounded by convicts howling for Kelly to put him out, there certainly was nothing for the Gorilla to gain—not a thing.

But Gannon hugged him closer.

"Damn you, Collars, keep on your feet. Go on—mebbe yet they'll match you with Dempsey or some o' them birds . . . Fer God's sake, keep yer feet! Hook, Kid—come on!"

There was no slow motion picture machine to record what happened. Even the newspaper men present were no experts on distance and judgment. But they all saw it. A sock may travel but six inches and land a knockout. It may . . .

But they all saw Kelly's glove come up. It wove over Gannon's bloody shoulder and laid to his jaw. The Gorilla seemed staring fixedly at the sky. Then he came down like a collapsing tire; slowly, between Kelly's arms till his knees hit the cloth. Then he sprawled slowly on his face.

College Kelly stood, blinking inquiringly about. He took a step forward as Butch began counting. The referee had got to ten when Kelly toppled. He came down across the hairy legs of the Gorilla and laid out still.

And the howling began. No question as to who went down first. The guards swarmed into the ring.

They lifted Kelly out and he got to his feet in the shadow of the Senator's pavilion. Deveny poured water on his face exultantly. Jenkins crowded near to congratulate him.

"Well, I won tobacco money on you till pay day," cried Deveny. "I told you you'd get him. Cut him blind—well, he's got near a year on the rocks to get over it."

Kelly stared at him doubtfully.

"My hands went bad. I'm through—"

The Gorilla raised his head from the mat. He had heard that. He was a mess of blood and sweat as he stared up at the desert sunset sky. The whooping, pleased convicts were swarming back to the bullpen gate before the barking guards. No one paid attention to Gannon. He had been licked, and as all the world knows, a man who is licked has no claim on public attention.

So no one looked again at the Gorilla as he scowled ferociously at the group below the Senator's seat. Nor heard his mutter.

Hands broke? Kelly's hand broke again? Well, they had done it. These grinning, jeering men out there—they had sent Kelly again to the hopeless task, had they? The Gorilla began to glower with that thought. He was thinking; but even the critical student of Rome's degeneration could not have guessed it.

Senator Frary glanced up just in time to see what was coming.

The Gorilla had cleared the space from the ring to the little frame stand. He roared something, but it made no sense. No one could guess that his guttural howl meant that they, these politicians, promoters, financiers and all, had again destroyed Kelly who might have gone on

to glorious things. And he'd had faith in Kelly always.

The Gorilla reached the group just as the first rifle shot rang out. A watchful guard tried to get him ere he struck his foes. But they dared not shoot toward the guest's stand.

DEVENY and Captain Jenkins went down together in the first sweep of Gannon's arms. Deveny felt his shotgun stock snap at the grip between Gannon's knees. Then the Gorilla was among the startled statesmen. They all went down. Cowboy Bob took the lunge of a butting shoulder and collapsed. Young Mr. Hadley of Oxford was pleading, and a giant elbow crushed the words back to his teeth. Beyond the group, the President's friend felt his flimsy pine platform reel and sink. Something stormed over it, and it fell to the sand. Seldom before had a diplomat of his rank been so close to sweat and blood.

Senator Frary gasped once and then felt a sock to his grizzled beard—not much of a sock. But then the Gorilla was handicapped by seven or eight state politicians, engineers, camp officers, and an Eastern press association man's ear was under his heel.

Then he was out of the ruck. The guards by the wires saw a howling figure clear the space toward the shadowy rocks of the cañon wall. And the eager rifles began mingling their snarl with the buckshot charges from the chain gang guards. Some one even ran to the captain's quarters and the machine gun on the porch began its yelp into the dusk. The dusty cottonwoods shook and shattered with lead.

Then Jenkins got out and felt of five broken teeth. The Senatorial party was feebly unscrambling legs and arms, getting up, brushing leaves and sand from its eyes and staring, listening.

"Went loco," gasped Bob. "Kelly knocked him out and it went to his nut. Did they get him, Jenkins?"

"They couldn't hit nothin' against them rocks. Ain't this a hell of a mess fer Senator Frary!"

The State secretary staggered aside and gabbled feverishly but louder than he meant:

"This ends it for Altemas. A disgraceful riot at the camp! That finishes us for the Federal dam. For Pete's sake, keep this out of the papers!"

Murchison, the press association man, began laughing in spite of his smashed ear. The world and all, as he knew, never would learn that nine-tenths of the deciding issues of war, diplomacy and high finance never do get into the papers.

Senator Frary heard it all and smiled even as he waggled his jaw to see if it still worked right. He assured them then that he was all right. They were very anxious about him.

Cursing guards were vainly searching along the dusky shadows at the foot of the cañon wall. Jenkins came back from the man hunt.

"If that bum got above the road there ain't a chance to stop him. Funny about that knockout. If it was anywhere else and any money carried on it, I'd think it was framed. Kelly's hands busted."

The newspapermen gave him the laugh.

"Kelly gets his parole and the hat money, doesn't he? He can go home to his sick kid!"

"Frame nothing!" put in Bob Phelps. "It was a clear case of brains and courage fighting to the last punch. Wasn't it so, Senator?"

Senator Frary smiled. He had been a bit annoyed at the knockout. The brute should have won, he thought, because he carried no handicap such as imagination, kindliness, chivalry, human love. No—the Gorilla was incapable of them. So he should have won over Kelly.

Not that the Senator cared except about his theory. Now he felt vindicated. His brute had got up after all and acted exactly as a brute should. He felt of the lump on his jaw and smiled again.

WHEN he followed his apologetic hosts to the official car he thanked them all. Reservedly, but they were astonished nevertheless.

He seemed so stirred, so moved from his habitual cold manner, that Congressman Bob Phelps couldn't refrain from muttering that he hoped—well, he wondered what the President's friend thought about the Altemas waterpower and irrigation project?

Cowboy Bob was startled. The Senator smiled discreetly. "You know, Phelps, the last hour I've been thinking this matter over. I've an idea the dam might just as well be built here as at Tavatari, as long as the engineers reported well on both projects. Not a word, though, till it comes up in the usual course at Washington."

Congressman Bob almost emitted a whoop. But instead he swung his political hat. The anxious group by the captain's porch saw this gesture. It surely meant good news for the Altemas proposition.

"I studied it with an open mind," went on Senator Frary, "and your people here gave me a very good time—interesting, very—"

"Good time," murmured Bob. "This—didn't that caveman wallop you one? Looked to me like—"

"In a way it confirmed certain ideas in my book. That fellow up the rocks there—dangerous sort, Phelps. Something to be reckoned with, though. The brute with an idea of revolt."

"He woke up and realized that Kelly'd knocked him cold. So he went berserk. Like the Roman gladiator, Spartacus, of old. Senator Frary, I'm not a scholar like you. But I remember that yarn in the old McGuffy's Readers. So you liked our show? I—I'm surprised!"

CAPTAIN JENKINS stood on his porch and listened to the motors purring down the mountain. When the last flick of dust had faded into the cottonwoods he went in and hurled his hat at the telephone.

"Say, Deveny! Is all them old goats at Washington like this bird? He never woke up till Gannon hit him! Looks to me like, in some way we can't understand, the Senator was pluggin' for the Gorilla to win!"

"I don't give three whoops and a hoo-raw what some dang down East Senator thinks. I'm glad that Gannon pulled his freight. Never felt safe with him in this camp. Let him ride, Cap."

Gorilla Mike Gannon was five miles down the cañon and two thousand feet above the new motor road when he saw the tail-lights of the Washington party fade around a bend on its way to the lower valley where Senator Frary hoped he would get a bath.

The Gorilla pawed his one good eye open to watch the spot. Five hours' going to where he could strike the Southern Pacific branch line, and he'd ride the rods out to the life he knew.

But first he grumbled his doubts of this kidding world:

"Sick baby—hell! Jes' some o' Kelly's old line to get me thinkin' and then knock me cockeyed. 'At wasn't it! What I wanted was fer Kelly to save his hands and then go get Dempsey or some o' them big money fighters. I wouldn't lay down fer no man—only Kelly. And them highbrow stiffs nagged him on to bust his hands on me. Twice they done it—an' me always hopin' Kelly'd come through to the top."

Then he blinked steadily back to the camp where Kelly lay this night with his hands in splints.

"Mebbe he will yet," mumbled the Gorilla. "It jes' always kept me thinkin'. Wanted to give him an even break—"

The scholar of the Senate hadn't thought that far. Faith and human love had no part in his scheme.

But when they began to give the other fellow an even break the apes lost their tails.

THE POISONER

A Pied Piper of the Coyote Country

By RAYMOND S. SPEARS

TRINIDAD SHARON sat on a tall sorrel horse looking down at a baby whiteface calf, or rather the remains of one. At a little distance a cow stood, lowing, her neck distended as she mourned her first born. A young cow, she had been inexperienced in caring for the newborn creature; and two coyotes had come by on their long circuit and discovered the easy meat. While one coyote had tricked the mother, the other had worried the calf to death.

Sharon owned the Broken Bottle Brand. He easily read in the loose ground most of the details of the tragedy before him. He would have sworn, had there been any one to listen; but he was alone. Coyotes exasperated him. This pair in particular had annoyed him now for about three years.

He got down to examine certain details. Pieces of the skin of the calf were pulled into long shreds. Where the beasts of prey had wrangled with the tender skin, he did not fail to note that there were long gouges in the flesh side, where the jaws of both animals had closed upon the hide.

"Gummers," he grumbled, "ain't got a good tooth in their heads. Had to claw into it with their paw nails and poke through the hide with their noses. Worriers! Huh!"

Sharon thus read the exact facts. Then he turned around to ride off in another direction without a look at the fool cow—as he thought—who hadn't known how to save her calf as an older one would have been able to do. He didn't feel sorry for her; the calf would have been worth twenty-five dollars to him, about three years hence, depending on the market.

"I got to do something about coyotes," he grumbled. "I better set some traps."

This was on Saturday. Over on the sandhills he met Pete Dustin of the YO outfit, who was looking around about his horses. The ranchers around there generally looked up their horse bands on Saturdays. Sharon told Pete about the calf. Pete was mad, too, for he had noticed where a coyote had come in and caught one of his wife's turkeys—a young coyote that acted careless and hungry.

"Why the devil hadn't the durned pup caught a sage hen, or something not good for much? Probably didn't know how, yet."

"I'm getting some traps, Monday," Sharon announced.

"I'll put some out, too," Pete said. "We'll catch up a few."

On Monday, shopping day of the range, the store at Moonlight sold out all their No. 4's and 5's, trap sizes. Almost all the ranchers had a campaign against coyotes dormant in their minds, and now they woke up. Traps rattled and clanked on the wagon bottoms in all directions out of Moonlight.

IN ABOUT three days eight or nine dozen traps had been distributed over the region of which the sandhills were the center and Moonlight the trading town. Nobody had caught any coyotes the following Monday. Some came close to it, though. Coyotes had come, almost stepping on the pans out by the feathers of the dead turkey. They had come to the shreds and mouthed bones of the calf, and wherever coyotes had walked before on their nightly rambles or raids.

"Catch anything?" the ranchers greeted one another two weeks from that Monday.

"Yes!" replies came, mingled with profanity.

Pete had caught two calves and a skunk.

Sharon had caught a colt.

The Dumbbell outfit had a couple of dogs. They apologized to the Jingle Bell outfit for catching one; they did not know the ownership of the other.

Hoot Colvin had his right hand wrapped up in a rag that once had been white. When the boys asked whether he had caught any coyotes, he declared that, standing up and sitting down, he'd be blamed eternally if he had. Then he went and bought some strong liniment. One of Hoot's cowboys privately told a friend in Pete's outfit that Hoot had forgotten where in the sand he'd set his trap, and had felt around for it with his hand. It was a No. 5, good for small bears, lobos and large coyotes. He found the pan all right, but he had to kick the stake out with his foot and come in to have two cowboys spring the jaws off his hand.

Nobody trapped any coyotes, except a fellow at a waterhole over in the sandhills north of town. He had set a trap under water where the coyotes came to drink and staked a buzzard on a rock out in the water. He was sure he had caught one, but it had pulled the trap loose and gone off with it.

Pete Dustin made a discovery about coyotes over in his country. He buried his traps mighty carefully, right where he knew coyotes were always coming together to romp around in a sand flat over by Piebald Creek. He put seven traps around in the runways there, and when he went to look for them he found sticks of wood in three of them. Two had been dug out and turned upside down. The others had been sprung with old horse bones and messed up so that they weren't fit to touch. If there had been men's tracks around, instead of those coyote paw prints, Pete would have strapped on his gun to avenge insult.

Then Dutch Luther Metzger brought in the skin of a coyote that he had caught. He had ripped the animal up the stomach and legs, stretched the hide on the side of the house, heavily salted, and then brought it in for admiration and a dollar and a half. It was a blue hide, with thin hair, of a coyote, about half grown.

Dutch Luther was a hero then. Everybody bought him a drink, one at a time—soda pop and such. He bought each one and himself a drink in turn. He had

quite a worried look when he started for home, not knowing whether root beer agreed with lemon sour, or buttermilk with vanilla soda. The worst of it was that he had taken ginger ale, and some plain bottled fluid, which the storekeeper thought was alkali reducer and precipitator, or maybe a new kind of drink a fellow had invented over on the Mojave Desert, to take the place of water in emergencies. It was very strong and made Dutch Luther bubble as if he were boiling inside.

Changing the places of the traps didn't do much good, either. One fellow tied two traps together, back to back. When a coyote turned the top one over to show his contempt for it, the other side caught the animal by the tail; but the coyote went away, leaving his tail behind.

TOWARD spring, after a winter of futile attempts to catch coyotes, the ranchers were just plumb indignant. They weren't accustomed to being laughed at and buffaloed to a standstill. All across the country, at night, they heard the prairie wolves out on the knolls. For about two hours after dark, the howling of the beasts undulated and wailed through the land. No other sound could be heard.

In their anger, ranchers went out and, aiming over convenient rests, would let go long and heavy lead projectiles from old-time elk and grizzly bear guns, thunderous in the night; or more crackling and sharp, the snappy .30-30 was loosed. The bullets, tearing by the knolltops, or splashing sand or gravel, would tumble and scream over the open country. The coyotes would yip and go off somewhere else to yelp derisively, echoing their own fears and alarms.

Each rancher declared that the particular coyotes in his own neighborhood could outyelp, outhowl, outmisery those anywhere in those parts. This led to considerable argument as to just what the coyotes did. Bark, yelp, howl, caterwaul, or wail in the wind? Anyhow, all agreed that the dad blasted beasts kept them awake. Sleep was more precious than debatable sounds of the open spaces. Something just had to be done. Coyotes were still killing calves every week or two, the papers declaring that the damage was $25,000 a year, or about 5,000 calves, in the free way of ranch and range talk.

A FELLOW came along with an itinerant outfit. He had a slight cast in the left eye, which gave him a look of unspeakable cunning. He had a lift to his nose, which was almost enough to make a man knock him down, if it hadn't been natural. He had heard, he said, that the sandhills country around Moonlight was bothered with coyotes. For himself, he was a coyote exterminator.

"You give me a bounty of three dollars and the hides, an' I'll bring 'em in, all skun out," he suggested, with a cunning wink.

Now three dollars was exceedingly reasonable, yet there might, judging by the noise, be a million coyotes. There wasn't any sense in paying a man three million, when the hides were worth eleven dollars apiece, besides. At the same time a bargain was struck. Coyote Dan was to be given a tentative whack at the first hundred coyotes, and then they would see. Coyote Dan, the exterminator, hemmed and hawed, but he said all right, he would do his stuff on a hundred coyotes to start.

Of his methods he would not talk. They were his secret, the means by which he had long lived and bought apartment houses over in certain cities in which he didn't like to live. He took the spoken words of the ranchers, of course. He rambled out with his old wagon and old horses and disappeared up among the sandhills where he hoped to find good water and plenty of quarry.

He was allowed to use stock for bait, in reason, killing some old cow or steer with a long and misspent career behind it.

THERE hadn't been any snow so far that winter. Then a norther came, dry at first, to shift the sand waves a wee down the lee, and then a blizzard blew in.

Wild life was driven to cover by the merciless wind and cold. Of course, Coyote Dan would be all right; that kind always was. But, when he did not reappear during the snow, some curiosity was expressed as to just where he was and what he was doing.

No one saw him. The snow blew away, evaporated, thawed. And then a strange loneliness afflicted the land. Men would go to bed and then, after pitching and tossing awhile, they would be filled with foreboding, going out to listen to the shrinking of the sands with the chill of the night wind. They would hear faint whispers; they would catch low, mysterious undertones; if an owl gave voice they were pleased, and startled too.

All rode wide after the storm to look after their horses and to take note of how their cattle had weathered the cold and snow. Trinidad Sharon went out into the sandhills; and up near the fenced off quicksand pools he found a dead coyote.

The beast was rigid, drawn up in all its muscles, and the lips were drawn back from clenched teeth. Tragedy had overcome the little wolf, and ravens had begun to devour it. Sharon followed the tracks of the animal in the loose sand, easily trailing it and reading the sign. For half a mile or so the beast had run, thrown itself, pitched and rolled, scrambled, retching in obvious anguish. And over yonder he found what was left of the carcass of a deer. The deer had been shot through the head. It had been torn and dragged about. Tracks of other coyotes led out from this place, and Sharon found dead victims in the tracks.

"Hell!" he grumbled under his breath. "Poison!"

He felt a cold chill, as normal humans do, at the thought of eating something good to the taste and then suddenly feeling the electric shocks of terrific pain shooting hither and yon out of the stomach. He remembered the bounty seeker who had promised results. Here they were. Coyote Dan had used deer for bait. That fact annoyed Sharon. The agreement had been to use downed stock or practically worthless beef.

Sitting on his horse, Sharon studied the lay. The sand all around the carcass of the deer had been tracked by innumerable paw prints. There still remained some of the poison pills—white cubes an inch square—where they had been thrown around, one or two beside each scattered piece of the dead bait. The poisoner was cunning. He had killed the deer from a distance. Then, when it had been nearly devoured in the hard times of the snow, he had thrown the pills for those coyotes that the stronger coyotes drove away from the bones and fragments. And these strong beasts, still hungry, had also taken their fatal doses, driven by implacable appetites.

Sharon rode on his way, presently. He didn't like it. He could not figure out his objection, but he laid it to killing a deer for bait. Deer meant good venison. He declared aloud that it served the coyotes right to get what they had gotten, for it was coming to them.

On Monday when he rode into Moonlight he did not tell what he had seen. Instead, he waited for somebody else to talk. No one did. Never had there been so much silence in Moonlight on a Monday trading day. Now and then somebody uttered a joke and loudly guffawed, but Sharon's neighbors glowered at him.

EVERYBODY had been out after the snow. Everybody had come upon the work of the coyote poisoner. They saw him coming, his old wagon with its out of whack wheels creaking and wallowing in the sandy roadway.

He had a hundred coyotes. He was wagging his head and beaming with sly satisfaction. He spread the hides out for the ranchers to see. He held up the big ones and grinned, as he indicated the fine points. He shook the fluff into the fur. He held one hide up and laughed, chuckling with amusement.

"Somebody cotched 'im by the tail," he remarked, "an' he was bobbed, all healed up."

And finally, after hinting expectantly, he flatly asked:

"Ain't I got three hundred coming to me? Why, gentlemen, for every one I found, two got away; so I killed three hundred, instead of just one hundred. An' them that et the dead ones died too. Strychnine runs right plumb through a carcass, you know, an' pisens it. An' what eats it dies, too, 'ceptin' birds. They don't die. They jes' likes pisen. Nothin' but varmints dies of pisen."

"Yeah," Pete Dustin growled, "that's what ailed my two dogs, ain't it?"

"Yeah, an' my kiddies had some cats they thought the world of—an' they had spasms!" another declared.

"Don't I get my three hundred?" the man demanded. "Here I done exterminated the c'yotes an' done as I 'greed."

"Give him the money. We'll keep our words!" Sharon turned to the storekeeper who held the money that the ranchers had chipped in pro rata.

THE POISONER'S fingers clutched eagerly at the stack of currency and he counted it, again and again, out of sheer pleasure. The ranchers turned away from him. He went over to one of the small, low voiced groups after a time.

"Gentlemen," he said, "theah's c'yote country kinda middling back from here. I can get some more—"

"No, you can't!" Sharon told him. "See that road down there? That goes down across the Cougar River. There ain't a coyote this side of it any more, not till it's beyond the Rimrock. Now you ride that trail. Don't stop! Keep going. You killed deer for big bait and you used poison. One's ornery and the other's yellow. Ride you, *pronto!* Hadn't been we 'greed as we did, we'd ride you out."

The poisoner lifted his nose as if to speak, but he noticed how little patience the ranchers had left. He climbed into the wagon. Wolf hair drifted out, from shedding caused by the poison. He clucked to his horses and rambled on his way.

"He sure did it thorough!" somebody remarked, "I hand it to him for that!"

"Yes, three hundred coyotes to catch up jackrabbits and cottontails, gophers and mice and whatever—" the storekeeper grinned. "How many calves did they really kill, anyhow?"

Honest, the ranchers counted up. There had been less than twenty. In two years there'd be swarms of rodents devouring their grass and alfalfa and whatever.

"That ain't the worst of it, either," Trinidad Sharon declared petulantly.

"What'd be worse?" several demanded.

"I can't sleep for the quiet," Sharon replied. "You know, them danged scoundrels was singing me to sleep, nights. I ain't never missed nothing in my life like I have those coyotes in the dark out under the stars, miserying to themselves—and to us."

"That's so!" Pete Dustin exclaimed. "I been wonderin' what in the devil ailed me. Huh!"

"An' we paid three hundred to get rid of twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of varmint protections!"

"Who proposed it?"

"That danged poisoner!"

"Another time we'll know what to do!"

"It'll be a long time 'fore we have any coyotes to sing—and skin!" Pete sighed, "Well—huh!"

The story of a farm lad who hungered for the range trails

CONQUEST

By WILLIAM CORCORAN

ONCE it had been called "the town at the edge of nowhere." Rolling prairie surrounded it, receding to lost distances on the horizon. Sparse parched grass covered the land, dusty and drab. Through the empty skies the wind blew, hour upon hour, day after day. And over the vast country lay two thin lines of steel, side by side, gleaming in the sun, heading straight for the town—the railroad that gave it birth.

A stranger might wonder what in all this land persuaded the community at Two Forks to endure its bleakness; what, indeed, enabled them to keep body and soul together. The dusty streets, the warped plank sidewalks, the rows of unpainted houses, gray with the premature age of the prairie country, looked much as one would expect to find their inhabitants, poor and ill nourished.

Yet the unlovely place teemed with life, blatant, coarse and lusty. Two Forks—the town at the edge of nowhere.

The phrase, if he ever heard it, did not occur to Zeke Bennett as he stared at the little town from the railroad station. The daily westbound from which he had alighted was puffing its clangorous way once more toward the setting sun; a faded carpet bag was at his feet; he had arrived. He saw, strangely enough, romance in the ugliness of Twin Forks. He saw on the endless bleak prairie, with a vision that was most practical, an empire yet to come. In young Zeke was the blood of pioneers.

Zeke's fellow travelers were making their way in more prosaic fashion toward the hotels and restaurants of Twin Forks, and he picked up his carpet bag and followed. As he walked along the main street there was a shining light of contentment in his eyes and his nostrils were full of the soft pungency of the prairie in the cooling day. He was an attractive youth; his gaze was frank and blue and his mouth was strong. He was not very tall, but there was a rugged muscularity to his body. The strength in his wrists and hands suggested to a knowing eye the miles of true deep furrows he had trod in the wake of a heavy plow.

Only two buildings in town were distinguished by an honest and unmistakable second story. Many of the stores and saloons were imposing with high false fronts, but the Grand Union Hotel and the Golden Hour Saloon were actual two story buildings, the latter with an outside stairway leading to the long room above,

which served as courtroom or dancehall, according to the need of the moment.

Zeke walked along the sidewalk, his heavy tread sounding hollow on the planks. Beyond the Golden Hour Saloon he saw the hotel and a little restaurant. These he would visit; and since he was hungry, the latter would win his patronage first. He paid no attention to the tall, somewhat intoxicated man who stood on the saloon porch almost in his path.

The tall man, wearing chaps and gunbelt, dark of face, with the wide, lean mouth that frequently goes with harsh and arrogant speech, was paying attention to Zeke, however. He stood none too steadily on his feet, but his scrutiny was bold and unwavering.

"Hey, you," he said, as Zeke was passing. "C'mere."

Zeke stopped and looked at the tall man.

"C'mere," repeated the latter. "I told you c'mere, didn't I?"

Zeke was willing to oblige, but he was uncertain of the other's purpose. The tall man's appearance could at no time be disarming, and now he was drunk.

"Yes," said Zeke. "What is it?"

"Damn your eyes," remarked the tall man, "when I says a thing I wants it done. You need learnin'. I'm the one to learn you, too."

He moved to accomplish this purpose, but unhappily a spur caught on the edge of the porch step and he was thrown forward. He pitched toward Zeke, and but that the youngster caught his arm and held him, the fellow would have sprawled into the road. He reared erect and bellowed instantly at the boy—

"Dang you, you going to do what I tell you?"

Zeke put down his bag. He stared at the tall puncher. Agreeably enough he said:

"All right. What you want?"

The tall man grinned, mollified. Then, swaying slightly, he frowned and reflected.

"What the hell? I went and plumb forgot what it was." He caught hold of Zeke's arm to aid himself. "Never mind. It wasn't nothing special. I tell you. You buy me a drink and we'll call it square."

Zeke grinned.

"Mighty sorry, but I ain't drinking."

The other's thin smile departed. He stared at Zeke.

"You refusin' to buy me a drink?"

"Well—yes."

The tall puncher stood back a pace. On his dark features was a scowl.

"When I invites anybody to buy me a drink, it's a plumb favor. Folks around here got sense enough to appreciate it. You're a stranger, and I give you a chance to take that back. You goin' to buy my drink?"

Zeke's nostrils quivered slightly.

"No, I ain't."

"Then, by all hell and damnation—"

Zeke moved. The fellow had his gun half out. Zeke felt certain enough that it was no more than a bluff; but it was a drunken bluff, and dangerous. Zeke's untutored but willing fist caught the unsuspecting puncher on the side of the jaw, just under the ear. The oath halted abruptly, the gun dropped from relaxing fingers, and the fellow himself crashed full length upon the boards. He lay there, stunned.

Zeke picked up the gun. He eyed the recumbent man, but as there was no immediate sign of activity, Zeke walked through the saloon doors. The bartender was talking to two patrons at the far end of the bar, and he came alert as he caught sight of the gun in Zeke's hand. He seemed relieved when the youngster tossed the weapon on the bar.

"There's a fellow going to call for this in a while," Zeke told him. "Will you keep it for him?"

The barkeep picked up the gun. Then he stared at Zeke with some surprise.

"This here's Big Foot Morrisey's weepon. How come you got it?"

"Big Foot gave it to me."

"Huh." The bartender scratched his head. "You sure it was him? I ain't aimin' to get into no trouble with Big Foot."

"Oh, he gave it to me, all right. You can ask him."

"Yeh? Where is he?"

"Outside."

The barkeep looked toward the entrance. He could not see, beneath the swinging doors, that portion of the walk upon which Big Foot reclined.

"What the hell! Won't he come in?"

Zeke was indifferent.

"You might ask him, mister."

And turning, he departed.

Outside, the tall man was raised on one elbow, feeling with the other hand the tender spot on his jaw. His eyes were glassy and he seemed unaware of Zeke's approach. The youngster picked up his bag, and resumed his passage along the sidewalk.

As he turned in the door of the little restaurant, Zeke looked back to the saloon. He saw the barkeep standing in the half opened swinging doors, staring in a mixture of wonder, fascination and horror at the dazed figure on the sidewalk.

WHEN Zeke sat himself upon a stool at the counter, a slim, dark haired girl turned from the range and smiled. It was an impersonal sort of smile; but as she surveyed him it slowly changed to an expression of curiosity and even some amusement. Her face, like her body, was thin, but there was vigor in it; and her bright, dark eyes were shrewd.

"Hello, granger," she said. "When did you hit town?"

Zeke felt his face grow slowly warm and red under her regard. He grinned, half abashed, and replied—

"Why, I just got off the train."

"Intentional or by accident?"

"Sure it was intentional."

"Well, sakes alive! You poor innocent!" The girl flipped a frying pan deftly, dropped its smoking contents on a plate, and slid the plate along the counter to a hungry patron. Then she halted before Zeke, her elbows spread on the counter.

"Well, Mister Man, what will you have?"

"Steak. And fried 'taters and a cup of coffee."

"And you come here deliberate," said the girl musingly. She cocked her head slightly to one side and studied him. "The wheat straws are still sticking in your hair."

Zeke's hand promptly rose. He found no straws. The girl's hearty laughter made him flush twofold.

"We ain't threshed wheat in a long time," he said.

"I'll bet you were just a threshing fool in your day, weren't you, old-timer?" she demanded.

"I done my share," he admitted. "My dad has had four hundred acres in wheat."

"My land!" said the girl, impressed. "Just imagine!" She smiled again, and with a barely perceptible wink, which seemed to tell Zeke that he was a nice young man just the same, turned to the range to attend to his order.

Zeke watched her in admiration. She was something new in Zeke's experience, spirited and self-reliant and yet a plain, neat little person. She made a fellow feel plenty warm and welcome inside. She was all right.

The door opened and another patron entered from the street. He was a tall, strong featured man, imposing in the garb of a prosperous cattleman; and he brought with him an air of geniality and heartiness. His heavy browed, dark eyes surveyed the half dozen men at the counter as though he extended to each of them an individual greeting. He seated his big body on a stool and eyed the girl. She glanced up from the range at him and smiled with a certain tight little reserve.

"Howdy, sister," the man said warmly. His voice rumbled and every one looked at him. "How's the best cook in Two Forks this evening?"

"Very well, indeed, Colonel Brant."

"Fine. That's fine," approved the colonel. "I had to come back just once more to try the finest fare south of the Missouri. I been tempted to stay even longer, but—business is business. This'll be my last good meal in many a day."

"Are you leaving us already, Colonel?" inquired the girl politely

"Well, I've got to start north again. My herd is bunched and waiting a couple of miles out, and tomorrow morning we take the trail. Nebraska, Wyoming, Montana —I don't know myself where it will end."

Zeke, impressed at first by the man, next a little hostile, was now relieved to hear that so formidable an admirer was departing.

The girl accepted the colonel's florid familiarity with matter-of-factness that robbed it of any but the most casual significance. The man was respectful after a fashion, though beneath his broad and kindly exterior a shrewd observer might note that Colonel Brant was one to take mighty good care of the colonel's affairs. His eyes, under those bushy brows, missed nothing; and the brain behind those eyes was sharp and wise, very wise.

There were two seats between the colonel and the young granger. These were occupied and abandoned by several hurried patrons before they finally were left vacant. The cattleman, idling over his third cup of coffee, glanced at the youth in friendly fashion, though with undisguised calculation, and addressed him.

"Excellent meal, eh, son?"

"Reckon it was," agreed Zeke.

"You're a stranger in town, I expect?"

"Just arrived tonight."

"Thought I hadn't noticed you around town," beamed the cattleman. He made the statement as though Zeke's presence would never have gone unnoticed under any circumstances. Zeke merely grinned.

"Have you any prospects in this country?" went on Colonel Brant.

Zeke looked thoughtful.

"Well, not any to speak of. I reckon I'll git along, though."

The colonel knit his heavy brows and looked thoughtful in turn. His strong eyes surveyed the youth from head to foot. "You look like a fellow that ought to get along anywhere," he declared. He swung further around. "Son, I've got a proposition. How would you like to come along with me?"

"Where?" Zeke asked cautiously.

The colonel gestured in a vague and splendid manner.

"North. We trail up through Kansas, into Nebraska; on, across Wyoming;

perhaps further, into Montana. I don't know myself. I have a fine herd out yonder on the prairie, mixed stuff, from yearling steers to stock cattle. I can average thirty dollars a head up on those northern ranges. There's wealth up there, son, for a man who will reach out and take it. Thousands of miles of the primest grazing country in the world. Fine cattlemen, fine fellows to neighbor with, to tie to. An empire in the making. Two thousand miles of it. Think of it!"

Zeke could not help thinking of it. It sent his fancy spinning and romancing.

"And the trail going up, boy! A young man owes himself that experience. The great rolling miles that cover the world, the slow, steady advance of the cattle, the clear nights when the sky is afire with a million jeweled stars, the fellowship of the finest men who ever left the dust of the towns behind them. Think of it!"

The colonel, too, was thinking of it; his eyes gleamed and his voice took on the timbre of emotion. He paused a moment while the spell of his voice slowly dissipated. He sighed, quickly.

"It gets me down deep, son, it honestly does. It is epic, the trail." He became businesslike. "Now it takes men to go up the trail. I presume you have a certain experience that will enable you to take your place among my men. Are you a rider?"

This time Zeke did not pause to consider.

"I ain't exactly what you might call an expert rider, Colonel; but I can straddle a horse and take care of it too. I've worked around stock back on my daddy's farm. I can tackle work and look out for myself most anywhere."

The big cattleman mused thoughtfully, and finally he nodded his head.

"Why not? Indeed, why not? Son, my men are all experts at their trade, but each of us had to begin. I think you would appreciate the chance to begin now. I can use you as wrangler and give you the bed wagon to drive. Will you come with us?"

Zeke took a deep breath. Far within had lurked the desire to plunge himself into the life of this raw country, to test himself beside the hardiest and most reckless of its sons. It was a primitive impulse, one strange to his ordinary, careful self, and he had hidden it even from his own sight. It seemed too romantic, too boyish, and Zeke was now a man. For the moment it rode him recklessly.

And then his exultation departed and he was disturbed. His gaze fell upon the girl of the restaurant, farther along the counter. Behind the colonel's broad back the girl was frowning and shaking her head. Her smooth brow was knit in emphatic disapproval. Her lips, when she caught his attention, plainly framed the word, "No!"

Zeke was puzzled. He looked at the colonel, a little self-conscious. Brant, eyeing him, smiled paternally.

"You're doubting yourself, boy. I can see it. Don't. It's a wise man who will stop to consider his own limitations, but you need not fear. You'll be among friends, and—it's an opportunity you could never cease to regret if you failed to take it. Never!"

This was an appeal well calculated to stir Zeke. To have lost a golden chance! He looked at the girl. She gave one firm toss of her head to emphasize her warning, and turned away to leave the decision to himself. He wondered; and as he hesitated the colonel rose. Into the big man's manner there came a trace of the peremptory.

"Well, son, how about it? Yes or no?"

"I'll tell you, Colonel—" began Zeke.

"I leave at dawn," interrupted the colonel. "I'm riding out to the herd at eleven o'clock tonight. I won't be back. Be down at Dobie's livery yard before eleven, and I'll have a horse for you. Get a pair of riding boots in place of those shoes. Don't keep me waiting. Eleven o'clock, don't forget."

And with a final beaming smile on the others in the restaurant, and a gracious farewell to the girl, he departed as grandly as he had come. The little restaurant

seemed smaller and more commonplace after he had gone.

Zeke faced the girl behind the counter with a certain amount of resentment showing on his face. She had interfered.

The girl found a moment of leisure presently, and came to him. She spoke so as not to be overheard by the others about.

"Don't you have anything to do with that man. Let him go and steer clear of him till he's gone."

"Why?" asked Zeke.

"He's not straight."

"In what way?"

"Listen, Mister Man. I cut my wisdom teeth some time ago. If there's anything crooked going on around me I'm not missing it. Take my word for it and leave the colonel strictly alone."

Zeke studied her soberly. The girl was very firm about her warning. But she was a girl, and the colonel had spoken as one man to another.

"There ain't anything for him to gain by being crooked with me," he said. "I ain't got but a little money, and he didn't ask me to do anything wrong."

The girl looked at him with narrowing gaze. Then she turned away without reply and attended to the wants of a hungry customer.

Zeke rose. He picked up the carpet bag and went to the end of the counter near the door. He counted out change to pay for his meal. The girl approached and received it from him.

"Are you going with the herd?" she asked.

"Yes, I am," answered Zeke.

She looked at him, troubled. Then her mouth pursed and she made a little gesture with her shoulders. She smiled.

"All right, boy. I wish you lots of luck. If you're ever in town again, come around and see me."

Zeke gravely promised that he would.

"Thank you," he said, and he pushed through the screen door with his carpet bag into the dusk.

DUSK came upon Two Forks, and soon the night. Coal-oil lamps with large tin reflectors beamed with mellow light in store windows. In many of the shops the interior was dark; but in one—"A. Fink: Clothing"—there still glowed an hospitable invitation to late trade.

Zeke Bennett surveyed himself in A. Fink's mirror, and judged the effect about satisfactory. He wore riding clothes—plain shotgun chaps, boots with heels medium high and the low crowned Stetson of the period. Alongside, A. Fink stood holding out a pair of elaborately fringed and decorated batwing chaps, and he did not share Zeke's contentment.

"It would save your pants, sure; but here is chaps like I don't sell to no common cowpuncher. To you I almost give them away. On you I don't make a cent. Look. Ain't that leather like you never saw before? Ain't it?"

Zeke buckled in another notch on the belt. "These'll do."

The merchant tried another tack. "I know. You can't fool me. You're a smart fellow, and I know it. You know goods, and I shouldn't fool you if I wanted to. You try these on. Feel them, look at them, walk around in them. I take two dollars off, and you walk out of the store with the finest pair of chaps in the store at half price."

"These'll do," said Zeke.

"Oy," observed the merchant; and threw the beautiful chaps back in the stock. He was not without resource, however. "You should have a gun with a belt. A fine belt I got here. Exactly like I sold to Mr. Hickok once, and he says to me, 'It's a fine belt, Mr. Fink'. And I wouldn't charge you half what he paid me for it."

Zeke looked at the gunbelts, and thought a moment.

"Let me see that one."

A fervent protest from the merchant—but Zeke took the wide, unadorned belt and strapped it on over the chaps. A. Fink abruptly abandoned argument, and ran to procure a selection of six-shooters

from the showcase. On his return he found Zeke before the mirror making draws and passes with a very satisfactory looking Colt .45.

"Oh," said Mr. Fink. "You already got a gun?"

"It was in the bag. It'll do."

"And could you use it?" breathed Mr. Fink as he watched.

Zeke smiled. It was a tribute he had earned by long hours of practise with the weapon, hours when he had wondered if such endeavor, in one going West, were very wise or very, very foolish. The merchant's words seemed to settle the matter. Zeke was content.

THERE were four men in the livery yard. Zeke Bennett, as he entered, eyed them with a certain misgiving. The moon had come up, casting a wan, soft light over the yard; but it did not reveal at first glance the shiny newness of Zeke's outfit. For this Zeke was grateful.

The four were idling, three of them talking in casual tense words through lips from which cigarets hung a-glow. The fourth, silent, a tall, sombreroed and spurred man, leaning against the barn wall, seemed to be the boss. He watched Zeke's approach, and as Zeke halted, came a little more erect and peered at him. There was an air of surliness about the man.

"What's this?" he demanded.

Zeke said nothing. He returned the scrutiny with even gaze. Also, he wondered how the man's memory functioned, for this was the now sober gunman he had knocked down a few hours gone, Big Foot Morrisey.

"Who are you, feller? I seen you somewhere," said Big Foot.

"Zeke Bennett's my name. I'm looking for a man."

"Huh." Big Foot came closer. "I been looking for a man myself. You ain't seen him anywhere, have you?"

Zeke stood firm, but his heart beat faster and he watched the long white fingers of the right hand of Big Foot Morrisey.

The tall man's voice suddenly snarled:

"You rat! I've got it in for you."

His left hand launched out and struck Zeke a powerful shove on the chest. It surprised Zeke, and he went backward several paces.

"Now pull that gun you got. Pull it!"

Zeke had no intention of pulling the gun. The tall man's right hand waited such a move far too close to his own ready weapon. This was a bluff of a different sort. Big Foot had the edge, and he meant to keep it.

"You're making a mistake, Big Foot," said Zeke. "You're making a bad mistake. It ain't me you're looking for."

Morrisey stared, making no reply. Zeke sensed his doubt, and seized the advantage.

"I just come in town half an hour ago, Big Foot. And I didn't set foot in Two Forks a month before that. You ain't wanting me."

One of the three standing by voiced his doubt.

"You said he was a farmer, Big Foot. This boy's a rider hisself."

"I know whether this is him or not. So does he. I'm going to count three. Then I'm going to shoot. Now git, you rat!"

But Zeke did not run, neither while the tall man counted nor when a streak of flame and the heavy report of a .45 came from the gun in his hand. Zeke felt the bullet thud into the dust at his feet, and he shivered. The tall man watched, gun poised, but indecision was upon him.

"You can't murder me, Big Foot," Zeke said. "I ain't done you nothing."

"How come you know my name? I never saw you around."

"Everybody knows your name, Big Foot. You was pointed out to me."

Another of the three chuckled softly.

"The kid's got nerve, all right. He must be talking straight."

Big Foot put away the six-shooter, and turned his back on Zeke. He leaned against the wall once more, surly and cheated, and bit a chew from a plug of tobacco.

Zeke sighed to himself softly. For a moment he watched them.

"You seen Colonel Brant around here?" he asked finally.

The four eyed him.

"Jed Brant? We're waiting for him. Why?"

"He hired me on."

One of them laughed.

"There's your jingler, Big Foot. And he don't scare worth a damn."

The others laughed softly also, but Big Foot Morrisey merely stared.

NO ONE paid much attention to Zeke the rest of that night. The colonel, when he arrived in the livery yard, merely nodded; and indicated which among the little band of mounts from the herd remuda Zeke would ride. There was little conversation as the cavalcade departed from town, and less when they arrived at the trail camp after the long ride. Zeke could see the cattle bedded down afar, their coats silver in the moonlight, the nighthawks slowly circling the great herd. It was an awesome sight, hushed and lovely and momentous.

Around a single lantern, conference was held, but Zeke was dismissed from this. "You sleep here, kid", he was told; and he did. Stretched out beside the bed wagon, he looked at the stars for a while, and thought. And the thoughts presently became dreams, and the dreams died, and deep sleep was upon him.

The dawn was cool and clear, pungent with the aroma of coffee and cooking food, brisk with the movement of men and animals. Zeke was up with the first, eager to help, and the cook commandeered him. Later, after he had eaten, Big Foot hailed him.

"Hey, kid. Rope a horse and get out there with the herd."

Zeke ran to obey. But he persuaded the wrangler to do his roping for him. The wrangler was a sharp faced youngster, who grumbled and swore, but uncertain of Zeke's standing, helped him. In a moment Zeke went tearing off over the prairie toward the herd. He went faster than he wished, but his fresh bronc seemed to have the only say in the matter.

The herd was under way, strung out in a long line and moving slowly, grazing on the dew drenched grass. A cowboy abandoned the line as Zeke approached, and raced for the camp. Zeke fell into his place, seeing nothing special to do beyond sit his saddle and take his cue from the pony beneath him.

In the rear, back along the trail the herd had traveled yesterday, a rider was silhouetted against the pale blue sky. He led a second saddled and unmounted horse. Zeke eyed him, and concluded the rider was not of the outfit. The other remained at a distance, surveying the camp and herd from the crest of a wave of land.

Zeke's eyes were young, and they were keen. They told him something he refused to believe at first, something which as he recognized its truth, gave him apprehension and wonder and an odd sensation of pleasure.

This strange rider in the dawn was a woman. And further, it was the capable, outspoken young woman of the restaurant in Two Forks.

Zeke reined his pony about, and sent him at a lope across the prairie toward her.

A stray wisp of black hair kept blowing across her earnest young face as she talked to him there on the prairie. Impatiently she thrust it back. There was little of the good humored, pretty girl about her now, standing at her horses' heads, facing Zeke. She was a woman, forthright about her errand, and with woman's privilege, a bit imperious.

"I'm not going to let you," she said. "You've got to come back. Last night it didn't matter. But that was before I got alone and thinking. I've come for you and I'm not going back without you."

Zeke was afraid of her. He looked back once to the camp and the herd and the riders who already stared curiously toward the swell on which they stood. From them, from the masculine aloofness of them, he drew courage. His face was stubborn.

"I'm a man," he said. "There ain't no reason why I should stay back while all those fellows go up the trail. I can take care of myself."

She was too wise to tell him she thought differently. She put a hand on his arm, a slender, gloved hand which held him when he would have drawn away.

"Boy, I've seen things happen in this country to your kind. No, wait; let me speak. This is my country; I know it. You don't. You don't know what you're bucking here. It's not just work and hardship. It's crookedness and cruelty and the smoothest tongues in the world, sometimes. This is one of those times."

"But I can't see—I can't see what for you're making such a point of bringing me back, particular."

She smiled faintly. There came a momentary pressure in the grip on his arm, and they stared at each other.

"What do you want me to say, boy? I like you, that's why."

It was a blow; an unfair blow, Zeke thought. It caught him inside and weakened him, melted the doggedness he tried to preserve. He felt alone and small, as he had, so long ago, when his mother overcame his boyish protests with her sure and gentle wisdom.

"Come, boy," she said. "You turn that horse loose and get on this one, and we'll go along home. You and me."

Zeke stared at the coarse grass at his feet, at the raw earth from which it sprang. He felt an affinity for it; he had slept last night against it, and had awakened with the strong, fertile smell of it in his nostrils. Once again there welled up inside him the desire to go, to know this land and to conquer it if necessary; and it surged upon the weakness that had seized him and overcame it.

"Answer me," the girl said. "Are you coming?"

He looked at her.

"No. I'm staying here, ma'am. I'm sorry, but I got to go on. I started for somewhere when I left home, and I ain't reached there yet."

"Do you know where you're going?"

"No, ma'am, I don't. But it's somewhere yonder." He felt baffled to know why this speech, which expressed his deepest need, should suddenly hurt him inside as he uttered it. "I've got to go," he repeated doggedly.

The slim hand fell from his arm. He moved away ever so little. Then, as he looked at her face, staring away off, his breath caught in spite of him.

"Oh, damn!" he blurted. "Oh, damn, anyway! I want to stay, too, can't you see? I'll come back. I'll ride straight back and tell you, and prove to you that I can make my way."

The thought came as an inspiration, and he explained his intention of returning one day with the miles of the trail behind him and money in his pocket and the memories of it all unforgettable in his memory.

Then she clutched his arm again. He stopped talking and turned to where she looked. In the clasp of her hand was something subtlely different this time. She was uneasy; she was even perhaps afraid.

Across the intervening prairie that lay between the camp and the knoll on which they stood, came Big Foot Morrisey at a determined lope.

ZEKE had a proper respect for Big Foot. He had estimated the man's arrogant nature, and knew the surly temper that ruled him. He had faced him once, and bested him; but he sought no further experiments in that direction. Yet now, as Big Foot approached, something stirred in Zeke, and he knew the man for an enemy. He could not have explained why. He was not even consciously aware of that hand on his arm, through which was transferred to him things elemental and unknown.

Big Foot eyed them. Hostility was in his gaze, a malice that moved without any set direction.

He grunted once, sourly.

"What're you doing out here this time of day?" he demanded of the girl. Vaguely, there was an insinuation of evil

in his voice. Zeke stiffened, and the girl gripped his arm tensely to hold him.

"I rode out on my own business," she said, with an inflection that was a tart reminder of his failure to do the same.

The man chuckled humorlessly.

"Business which brings a gal out on the open prairie at the peak of dawn—"

"Mr. Morrisey," cut in Zeke. "This here happens to be her business, entire, and I know."

"You shut up," ordered Morrisey. "Further, you git back to the herd where you belong. I knew this gal's business before you learned to chaw tobacco."

"Oh, please!" cried the girl. She tried to place herself before Zeke, but the young man thrust her aside. "Please! Oh, boy, listen to me. Listen to me!"

"By God!" said Zeke. "I don't know just what you mean, but you'll take it back. By God, you'll take it back!"

Morrisey looked at him. His mouth was barely open, and a little brown stain of tobacco crept over one lip where it turned down in a snarl. The man's eyes were cold and opaque.

For a breath they stood thus without moving, without speaking. Then Morrisey spoke to the girl.

"I understand this fellow hit town yesterday. When did you meet him?"

The girl knew nothing of the object of this question, nor did Zeke sense it at the moment. She looked from one to the other, her eyes anxious, and answered:

"He came straight from the train to have supper at my place. That's when I met him."

Morrisey eyed the young man again. He nodded grimly. The girl had confirmed what he wanted to know. Zeke's story was false, and he was the unknown who had struck him down yesterday afternoon. Never in his life had Big Foot Morrisey measured his length on the ground for any man. There was no compromise in Big Foot, and the incident could not be forgotten in a day.

"You little rat," said Big Foot. "You yellow little rat."

Zeke's face was pale. He could even feel the pallor that crept over it, but likewise in him there was no compromise, no back road to travel. He must plunge ahead, for all the white chill that ran through his young body.

"Never mind me. Leave me out. You take back what you said before." There was a pause, while no one spoke. Zeke trembled, and the words were torn from him.

"Damn you, do you hear me, Morrisey?"

"Yes," said Big Foot.

And his gloved hand, his left hand, flashed up and struck young Zeke across the lips.

The girl screamed once, and a profundity of horror was in her voice at what she saw happen before her. Zeke recoiled, and a trickle of blood ran down his white drawn lips. His own hand drew back, perhaps to strike, perhaps not. It was an instinctive move, such as are made when men do things which are quicker than thought. His hand caught the butt of the Colt in his belt, for Morrisey's hand, his ready right hand, grasped at his own weapon. There were two explosions, two vicious jets of flame. There was an incredible sound, like the soul of a man passing with one agonized gasp through his lips . . .

THEY rode. They whipped the flanks of their horses with rope ends till the great beasts fled in terror. No speech was possible for the pounding of shod hoofs on the prairie and the whistling of wind in their ears. They rode, the boy clinging grimly to the unaccustomed saddle, the girl like a figure of legend, light in her stirrups, dark wisps of hair streaming from her pale forehead.

Behind them, half a mile off, four horsemen raced in their trail. Over the rolling land they came, rifles in their hands and a sudden, cruel vengeance in their hearts for that which had happened far behind them on the prairie.

Thought had been swift in Zeke's brain after the sound of those two explosions had ceased to ring in his ears. He was not

the sort to be stunned by tragedy, not while he was in the midst of it and had claimed a just reckoning. There was a swift coursing of his blood, an almost savage exultation that glowed in his hot eyes as the other man staggered and sprawled at his feet. He had paid no attention to the girl; instantly he had stared over the waves of dun grass to where those small distant figures by the camp stood stock still, their faces turned toward the hillock on which he waited alone.

"The horses!" the girl had cried. "Get in the saddle. We've got to run."

She had clutched at him, and her hands had found the muscles of his body tensed, like steel bands. For that moment he had paid her no heed, until she fairly shook him.

"Are you crazy? Boy, we've got to run for our lives. Get in the saddle."

And he had risen to the back of the animal she had brought along on her visit; and together they had turned and streaked across the prairie, while at the camp behind them men rushed to pick up rifles and bridles and saddles for pursuit.

The land looked strange to Zeke by day. He wondered in which direction lay the town; if, indeed, it was ahead. The girl led the way, sure of herself, he thought, though there was no perceptible trail through the scattered grass and drab earth. Last night, it had seemed that they followed a road of sorts in riding to the herd. . .

Soon Zeke was aware that they rode through what once had been cultivated land. There were dead corn stalks; acres, barely distinguishable, where kaffir corn had thrived long gone; patches of watermelon vines, overgrown with the rank prairie grass of astonishing breadth. With the eye of one who has delved into the fertile earth and nursed it and been rewarded with its green, lush bounty, Zeke saw all this. To him it was a painful sight to behold, sad and futile and defeated, the more tragic for the fact that the fallow land lay rich with life, awaiting the return of him who had conquered it, and who would never come back by the signs abounding everywhere.

They rode over a swell, the horses gasping, straining, desperate. In the gentle trough of the rolling earth before them a little creek shone in the morning sun, clear and bright. A few trees reared along its bank, willows and cottonwood. Across, set into the rising land, Zeke saw the first sod house of his experience, low, almost flush with the earth. He knew what it was; he had heard them described. It had the look of barrenness and abandonment that lay over those empty fields.

Through the creek they splashed, and the horses labored toward the sod house, eager to reach what they took for their goal. Zeke sensed their anxiety to halt and rest, and pitied them. To his surprise, the girl beckoned him to head straight for the hut. Before it, she dismounted. Zeke dropped from his own horse, which stood head low, legs apart, beaten.

"Another mile would kill them," said the girl. "They are livery horses—no good for a ride like this. Those men are on fast, hard ponies."

"Where is town? Are we standing them off here?"

"Town is too far for us to think of now. You've got to hold them. They can't touch us in this den."

"They can wait till we give up," he protested.

"No, they can't. They've got a herd to look after. Men will be passing by here. This is Freedom Creek, on the trail to town. The sheriff will be notified, and if he comes you will be perfectly safe; I'm your witness. They won't want any officers."

"Why not?"

"Never mind. All we need to do is wait—and fight them off."

Zeke doubted her assurance. And soon his doubt seemed justified. They had herded the horses in a lean-to nearby, and entered the dark, cavernous interior of the sod hut. The door was still solid, and they were able to bar it. Two tiny windows admitted light. They were mere

gaping holes in the earthern walls, and Zeke saw their value as loopholes for defense. Truly, no one could touch them. It was not possible to shoot through the banks of earth that made the shallow walls, nor to set them afire. And while Zeke's ammunition held out, no man could approach the house from its only vulnerable point, the front.

Yet there was danger, if those grim riders were stubborn men, with patience to besiege the place and exact their retribution for what had been done.

FOR A long time Zeke, watching through one of the windows across the creek to the rising crest of land opposite, saw nothing to indicate that the pursuit was upon them. Then later a solitary rider appeared, outlined on the morning sky. He stared across the creek to the sod house. He studied the door and windows deliberately; and Zeke, though he knew the man could not see him within, came to realize that the girl's stratagem had been foreseen by the band.

The men were not exposing themselves together. They knew Zeke would be unlikely to fire without warning on a lone man. Perhaps even now they were scattering, riding down the creek and around behind and putting into execution some move to annihilate the occupants of the tiny cabin. Zeke gripped the smooth butt of the Colt and checked the racing thoughts which suggested such things.

As time passed, Zeke's attention strayed from the window and went to the interior of the house. It was completely furnished, if such a term can describe so meager a place. There was a stove, a table, chairs; there were crude beds against the rear wall; colored lithographs hung on the walls and even a supply of domestic utensils rusted in one corner. It was dusty, abandoned, but it once had been the center of a man's horizon.

"Who owned all this?" he asked.

The girl, who had been standing silently beside the second window, answered:

"A good man lived here. He made this farm out of the raw prairie, and it was a good farm. He died."

Zeke caught the tragedy behind that simple statement.

"You knew him?" he asked.

She nodded.

He thought a moment, and then went on:

"Gosh, a man could make a real farm out of this land again! It's rich. I didn't know it till I saw what had been growing here once, as we rode through. My dad could have done it. I could do it."

He looked about the walls. A framed paper caught his attention. It was a warrant of a non-commissioned officer in the Confederate armies. It bore the name of Sergeant Malachai Green, of the Tennessee Light Rifles.

Zeke could not account for the pathos of that simple paper, which reached him and touched some urgent pity within him. His own father had fought with the Union forces; perhaps these two had faced each other across bullet torn fields, hating, killing. And within them was a bond greater than that which they fought to preserve or destroy, the bond of simple men who cleave to the earth, who drive a straight deep furrow where the shrieking lead of battles once has scored no more than the surface of the land.

Sergeant Malachai Green of the Tennessee Light Rifles! Granger Malachai Green of the prairies. Zeke, on the acres which the man has made part of him, knew Malachai Green. Theirs was a common heritage. Zeke could not analyze; he only knew that some deep urge was at work within him as he stood where a good man once had lived, and where he had died.

The girl moved.

"I think—" she began. Apprehension was in her voice. She did not complete the sentence. The tiny room was filled with a shocking sound, a crash more perilous in implication than effect, but terrifying. The rakish tin chimney from the stove jerked and fell apart with a clatter and a scattering of soot.

"They're overhead!" cried the girl. "Oh!"

"Don't worry," Zeke told her. "They can't touch us yet. They can only shoot down the chimney."

There came the report of a shot in the distance, and at the same instant a small mirror on the rear wall shattered and fell as the bullet whined in one of the windows and struck.

"Down!" Zeke cried. He felt fear now, fear for the girl. "They're firing from the swell across the creek, in through the windows."

There followed a precise and deadly raking of the little sod house. The men fired rifles, lying prone on the crest of land opposite, and they aimed carefully for the tiny windows. The two defenders of the cabin sat on the floor, and the girl trembled in the boy's arms. Leaden slugs buried themselves in the rear wall after ripping through whatever lay in their path. Once a slanting bullet tore a gash straight across the framed warrant that hung on the side.

"They're crazy," Zeke cried once. "They can't expect to get me, and they don't know but what they'll kill you."

"They can't touch us, boy," she whispered. But she trembled and clung to him.

The besiegers overhead took to firing down the chimney hole again. This, Zeke knew, unless repelled, might develop into something really dangerous. The rifle fire from across the creek was desultory now. He got to his feet, gripping the six-shooter. He evaded the girl's alarmed inquiry for his intention, and threw the bar from the heavy door. Jerking it wide open with a sudden pull, he raced outside.

A man stood overhead on the low roof of the sod hut, gun in hand. As Zeke perceived him, the fellow was staring down the tiny chimney; but in a flash he whirled and sent a shot toward the boy. Zeke fired once, and his bullet was effective. The man had missed, and he would not fire again. He cried out, dropping the pistol, and staggered away with desperate awkwardness, his hands clutched to his body. Zeke sought nothing more. He ducked back into the hut, and slammed the door to. It thundered after him, as a series of angry missiles struck its stout boards.

Soon after this there was a let-up in the fire. Zeke was suspicious of it, and the uncertainty forced him to the window. On the rise of land across the creek he could see no sign of life. Beyond it somewhere, he knew, the besiegers lurked. What were they doing?

Then he gripped the window sill in astonishment and alarm. Over the crest, where they had been securely entrenched a moment ago, came a pair of horsemen, galloping. They were spurring their mounts, intent on their purpose, as though charging the little sod house. Straight for it they came, down the slope, into the creek, where the spray from the horses' hoofs shone in the sunlight. Out of the water and over the bottom land they charged. But they did not fire, and uttered no word.

Zeke laid his gun on the window sill and waited. His face was grim. Their purpose was impossible to guess, but it looked like a showdown. Well, they could have it!

And then the incredible happened. That pair swerved to one side, while still a hundred yards off, and never glancing at the sod hut, raced out of view to one side and on up the hill behind the hut. There were shouts up there, the thundering of hoofs, receding in the distance, and then silence. Zeke wondered, afraid, unable to see what was going on.

Then, riding along the crest of the swell across the creek from which the pair had just decamped, there came a trio of strange horsemen. Their horses walked, and the riders stared with obvious curiosity at the cabin and beyond to the hill in its rear. Zeke saw that they were strangers.

"We're saved!" he cried. "Here come some men. They scared off the punchers."

The girl came to the window, hope leaping to her eyes.

"They did," she exulted. "That's why

they traveled so. They were carrying away the one you shot."

They rushed outside and waved their arms joyfully at the three who rode all unconscious of the service they had rendered. Relief was on the two, and happiness at the lifting of the terror. Zeke threw an arm about the girl and hugged her wildly, and he was completely unaware of the lack of propriety in such unseemly action.

The three men increased their pace, crossed the creek and approached.

IT WAS a queer court that was held on the spot before the bullet splintered door of the little sod hut. And it was typical of that land.

The three were cattlemen of the country. The girl knew them, and knew that they were honest men. The oldest, a gray haired, solid bodied man with a tanned, gentle face looked upon her with surprise.

"What's this all mean, Mary? Seems like there's been a mighty lot of shooting going on round here."

She told him. She told in detail all that had happened that morning. When she spoke of the dramatic death of Big Foot Morrisey on that tragic hillock, they looked at Zeke keenly. There was no condemnation in their eyes; there was not even judgment. They knew Big Foot for what he was. The killer of Big Foot had only himself to answer to for the deed.

"You come all the way out here to bring back this young fellow?" queried the gray haired man.

"I started late last night," she said. "I slept here, and went on at sun-up."

"Hm," he reflected. He turned to Zeke. "Young fellow, you're luckier than any heedless youngster deserves to be. You had a good friend. You don't know the colonel, do you?"

"No, I don't exactly."

"You never heard, then, of the fellows he has taken up the trail, worked lean and rare, and then sent off without a cent of pay. Did you? He pays his gun-fighters, and picks up his working crew where he can get them." He glanced at the girl shrewdly. "Mary knows him, all right. I guess everybody who's been in this country a time gets to know the colonel."

The girl nodded in ironic agreement.

"You ain't heard the most recent news about the colonel, Mary, I suppose?"

She looked doubtful.

"No. What news?"

"Well, it ain't rightly news. It's mighty secret, in fact. But some of us knows that when the colonel reaches the river, north a hundred mile, his trail is ended. Officers, inspectors, are up there at the ford, tipped off to watch for him. They're collecting more than tax. There's likely to be fighting and killings. And anybody with that herd, which is more than half stolen stuff from the south, is headed for a mighty unpleasant end. Anybody, from the colonel himself, who is due to meet Judge Parker, to his greenest wrangler. That includes you, young fellow."

The girl paled a little at this news.

"Oh. I didn't know that. I knew something was crooked but—" She looked at Zeke, and he looked at her in turn, and some of her paleness was on his own face.

"I'm beginning to see now," he said. "But still—I can't understand. Why would he hire me if he wanted crooked gun-fighters?"

They smiled. It was not easy to explain to this earnest youngster how valuable his own honesty and lack of suspicion made him to Colonel Brant. The colonel had sized him up. Loyal, hard working, a man to go among the hoe-men settlers whom they passed, and talk their language, to deal with them and placate them. A man to rely on when the queer passions of their breed swept among the fighting men of the outfit. A guileless fellow to prey upon.

Zeke listened, though it was still hard for him to relinquish his dream of romance.

RIDING up the main street of Two Forks, when the party arrived in town, Zeke became suddenly aware that

he was once more adrift. His bag, with the few belongings he had not wanted to take on the trail, was at the hotel. The proprietor had promised to keep it for him. It was now the only tie he had, a meaningless, trifling sort of tie. He no longer possessed the assurance which had accompanied him on his arrival yesterday, and wondered what he might do, where he might go in this strange country.

When the horses were returned to the livery stable, and the girl had cooked them both a meal in the restaurant, he felt better. He wanted to talk to her, and now he could not. She was busy. She resumed business as though nothing of moment had occurred to her at all that day. Zeke felt that this was somehow wrong, but he did not know what to do about it.

At length she came to him.

"Boy, you're taking life too seriously," she told him. "Go out and buy yourself a drink. You need it. And I know you're not the kind to forget how many one drink is."

"I dunno," he said dubiously. "I—"

She patted his arm.

"Go ahead and amuse yourself anyway. I'm busy, and you mustn't start thinking—yet. Come back this evening when I'll be free to take you in hand. Thinking will be your ruin!"

"Well, all right."

"Say 'All right, Mary.' "

He smiled.

"All right—Mary. It's a nice name."

Her eyes were bright as they followed his strong young back out the restaurant door.

All that evening Zeke mooned around the little town like one who has lost something, and does not know what it is. Zeke thought he knew what it was. He felt impelled to a certain regret that his trail herd venture had come to such an ill end. Yet, when he set himself to thinking about it, he was not really sorry. He was troubled by no remorse over the shooting of Big Foot, nor of the other man. What was it? Zeke was dismayed at his inability to analyze things sensibly any more.

"Damn, anyway," he said, and wandered into another saloon, to watch the faro play.

Twice he found himself, in his wanderings, in the vicinity of the little restaurant. Once he watched from across the street for ten minutes, during which the girl served her late customers with the unfailing good nature and good food that brought them to her doors. She seemed so much at home, so unaffected by the events of the day, that Zeke was only the more moody for having watched her.

He wandered off again, that time, contemplating the wisdom of getting thoroughly drunk for the first time in his life. At ten o'clock, however, Zeke was back at the restaurant again. The place was empty. The girl was busy in an absorbed manner, cleaning up her remaining dishes and pots and pans for the morrow. She gave him a cheery greeting and invited him to partake of her homemade pie.

Zeke accepted, and seating himself at the counter, soberly consumed a very satisfactory slice of apple pie in silence.

The girl hummed at her work for some minutes, and then put down the plate she was polishing, and stared at him.

"Land sakes! What's the matter with you anyway? You look as though the wolf ate your grandmother."

Zeke grinned, and grew sober again.

"I dunno," he said. "I don't know where I'm at. After all that happened I feel—" He hesitated.

"You're not regretting things, are you?"

"Yes, I am." Quickly he added, "No, not that way. You were right about the colonel. It's just that I'm all at sea. I bungled that, and I don't know where I'm going next."

She picked up the plate again and commenced polishing its gleaming surface once more. Rather unnecessarily, Zeke thought.

"There'll be other herds bound north," she suggested. "You might get on with one of them."

"Yes, I might."

Her eyes rested on him a moment,

behind their clear depths a thoroughly womanish annoyance, and then she deposited the plate on a pile of its fellows with a clatter of impatience.

"Hm," she uttered.

Zeke glanced at her uneasily. He dropped his eyes. For a while he thought, and when he spoke it was with deliberation.

"That there farm out on the prairie. I been wondering about that. Some day that's going to be a real big thing. This town's bound to grow. The railroad's sure to build up the country. People are going to want more than salt pork and fresh beef and potatoes. Things could grow in that earth, green things and fruits that come in by rail now."

She was listening.

"Yes?" she encouraged.

"I was wondering— Does anybody own that land? Did this Malachai Green have any heirs?"

"Sure, that's owned land. And Malachai Green's heir owns it."

"Would he sell?"

"Not for anything."

"Oh."

"You might get it on lease, though."

"Could I?" asked Zeke. "You think so?"

The girl leaned over the counter, close to him. She looked into his eyes.

"Listen, boy. Do you really want to settle down on that old place? What happened to your dreams of riding across the world?"

Zeke was thrown somewhat off the track by these questions. He had been asking himself pretty much the same thing. He had wanted to attach himself to that land immediately he had found it. Yet he wondered if the land alone had so altered his desires . . .

"I do," he said. "It's really big. It's bigger than just riding around. It's getting somewhere, building something."

"And that's your only reason?" she demanded.

Zeke looked at her. He saw her face, calm and even. He saw her hair, dark, glinting in the lamplight. He became aware of her clean white skin, and the lips which were set so softly as she waited. He became aware of other things, which he found somewhere in the far distances of those blue eyes.

He shoved aside the empty plate before him and leaned over the counter.

"Wait," she said. "Walk home with me."

She drew off her apron, came from behind the counter. She put out the lights, one by one, and got the door key from the cash drawer. They went out.

Zeke found her strangely bent on talking business.

"You can get the Green place on shares," she informed him as they walked along the street. She seemed to ignore the great, white moon which had crept over the long horizon while they were inside. "The present owner will let it go for—for an even split."

Instantly Zeke was dismayed.

"Why, that ain't reasonable. It couldn't be fair nohow, not now, with all the work of clearing up and breaking ground again in the first year."

"The owner—well, I'm sure the owner wouldn't consider anything less."

Zeke was plunged in gloom again. He felt agitated, baffled, and his momentary flight of spirit was suddenly dead within him.

They arrived at the big, frame boarding house where she lived. They stood on the porch.

"Boy," she said, "you never asked me my name."

"It's Mary— No, I didn't, at that. Your complete name."

"It's Mary, all right. That's what I wanted you to call me. The rest of it is— Green."

For a second something which wanted to do so failed to click in Zeke's brain. Mary. Mary Green. And he remembered.

Malachai Green, of the Tennessee Light Rifles!

"He was your father," said Zeke. There was excitement in his voice. "You own that land on Freedom Creek!"

"I couldn't let you have it for less," she stated.

Something did click in Zeke's brain this time.

"Pardners," he cried. There was more than excitement in his voice. He moved out of the moonlight which slanted across part of the porch.

"Pardners, boy?" And her voice, oddly, trembled.

"Oh, my Lord! Mary—I'm a crazy thing. I didn't know."

"I did." There was a pause. "But, oh, my dear, I thought I'd have to tell you my own self."

The great, pale moon shone benignly down on the sprawling prairie town, and somehow, after the curious manner of moonlight the world over, it created witchery, and the town was a place of peace and loveliness and whispering delight.

PRAYER

By Noel Stearn

"Roon . . . God of Going . . ."
—DUNSANY

THE LITTLE houses smirk
And the cottages are smug
And the big houses are heavy with a fatness.

O Roon, Roon,
It is you who have drawn this film
Across my eyes.

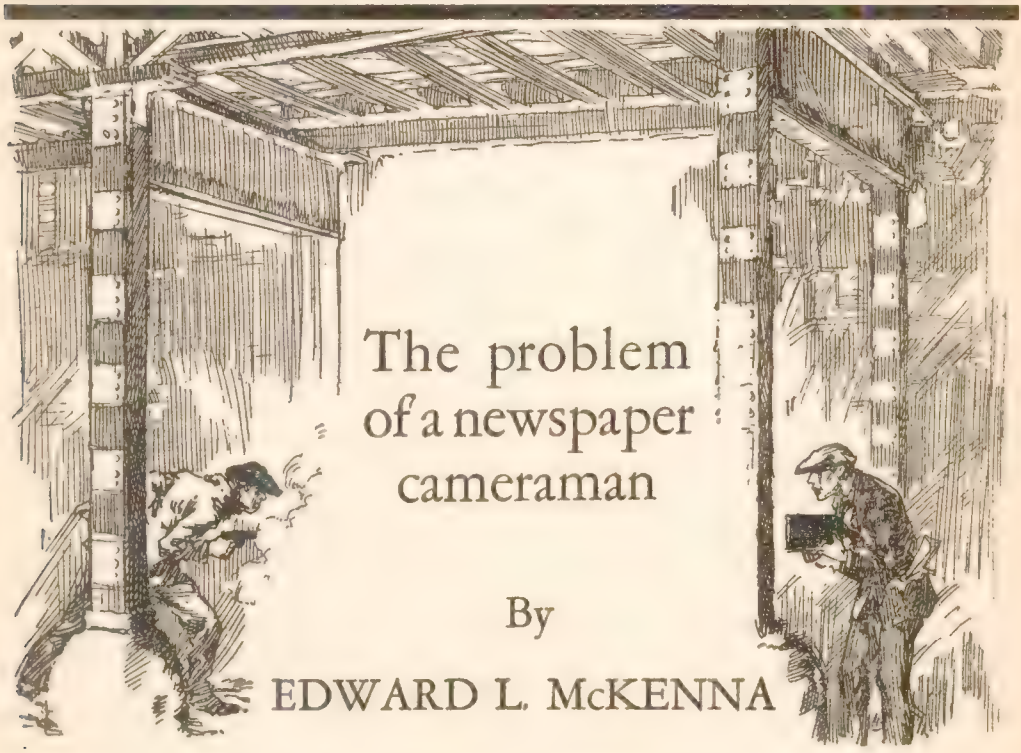
My four walls are bland and blank
Like a kiss from habit.
And outside I know that the stars sneer
And the wind staggers at corners
And there are street-lights,
Street-lights,
And streets!

The far horizon squats and grins,
Holding something behind his back.

O Roon—
O Roon, it is you who have whispered
That in his hand,
Hidden,
Is the only beautiful thing.

Which hand?
Which hand, O Roon?

DOUBLE EXPOSURE



The problem of a newspaper cameraman

By

EDWARD L. McKENNA

EVER hear the one about the old friends who met on Park Row and one of them said—

"Charlie, what are you doing now?"

Charlie burst into tears and answered:

"I—oh, Jim, I'm a reporter for the *Evening and Morning Tabloid*, but I ask you, Jim, don't tell mother. She thinks I'm playing the piano in a dive over on Eighth Avenue."

It may very well be that one of the tabloid fellows himself started it going around, and it's not to be taken too seriously. They're much like any other outfit, except maybe they have to work faster and get their stuff over quicker. They have to depend more on the news and less on essays than, say for example, the *Westminster Gazette* does.

Anyhow, Joe Hawkes was a photographer for the New York *Daily Picture Bulletin*—not exactly a reporter, though he did do some Sunday feature stuff. He liked the syndicate stories and always was nosing around for them. Somewhat literary in his tastes, at that, he was always carrying around a volume of the Modern Library in his pocket—Norman Douglas, or Sudermann, or Dostoyefsky.

"I'm nuts about this guy Dostoyefsky," he told one of his friends in the composing room, who suffered from similar afflictions. "He's got the right idea. He thinks the world is a madhouse. So it is."

He had gradually worked up to this pinnacle of sophistication. His first professional study was published in *Saint*

Nicholas when he was fifteen, and it bore the caption, "Hunting Wild Animals Without a Gun—Second Prize, Silver Badge". His latest was entitled, "Cry Baby Bandits at Bay". He is a high priced man relatively, and being a bachelor, he manages to look pretty well. That is to say, you'd never pick him out from the rest of the passengers in the Pullman; Dobbs hat, eighty-five dollar suit of clothes, heavy tan shoes, no emblem in the lapel, no fraternity pin, quiet and smallishand reserved; thirty-two or thirty-three he must be.

He started out as a Main Street photographer up in Bridgeport, his home town. Then he worked the street carnival racket for a while—snapshots, ten cents apiece. Had a studio over at Coney Island one summer, with an extremely used but highly painted Cadillac for a backdrop. It rained a lot that summer, and he found himself pretty much up against it. Not because of the light, of course, but because people won't go to Coney Island when it rains—they're funny that way.

He'd stand there in front of his little place—he was on the Bowery, about a block and a half below Steeplechase Park—and watch it cloud up about ten o'clock in the morning, and hope it would clear and half believe it would. Then a few drops would fall, and soon it would be pelting down. All the time a merry-go-round on the corner would be rendering, "Swing Me High, Swing Me Low, Dearie", or "I Want to Go, I Want to Go, a Soldier Man I Got to Be". He was only twenty-one or twenty-two, and he was engaged to be married to a chorus girl on the Columbia Wheel, who was working for the summer at Ravinia Park, which is some miles distant from Coney Island. Late in August she wrote him that all was over. It taught him a good lesson; he's never been engaged since.

To make things even more annoying, the Saturday before Labor Day was clear and hot. But Joe banged the door of his gallery shut and he and his pet camera went up to the Polo Grounds to see a double header with the Cubs. He got in early and picked his place just clear of the netting in the grandstand. Made a couple of shots of Archer cutting down a man at second base and caught a sweet play at the plate. They turned out so well that he sent them to the sporting editor of *The World* just on the off chance. *The World* invited him to drop in. It was explained to him that *The World* wasn't doing much with pictures just then, but there was a paper in the Middle West that was experimenting a lot; why didn't he try them?

Many a time, after he went to Chicago and got the job, Joe wondered what it was that made the fellow give him the information about it. Because there was nothing in it for him, that was a cinch.

But there was for Joe. Sport stuff was what he covered first—races and prize fights and football games. He made that picture of Man o' War, remember? And he made one of Harold Pogue in the Illinois-Chicago game, straight-arming a tackler, and one of Bart Macomber taking out the interference in the game with Minnesota that were just as good but had only a local interest and never achieved much publicity. He developed a knack of getting difficult pictures—tricky lighting on the one hand, and people who didn't want to be photographed, or at least, not that particular way, on the other. A posed photograph was an abomination to Joe.

"I don't care for stills," he would say.

However, he never did much work in those days with the moving picture camera, so when the war broke out and he was drafted he remained a buck private in an infantry regiment at Camp Gordon. He tried everything he knew to get into aviation, but he had a fine chance, with no college degree and no family. Rather a pity, because he would have been quite useful after a few weeks. Naturally, his own experience didn't lead him any closer to sweetness and light.

After the war, the tabloids. It wasn't long before he got a job. Not much to it at first—pictures of girls returning from

Europe and managing to look like actresses, bathing girls—that sort of thing, all stills. It bored Joe very much. He wasn't exactly excitable, anyway. Even the sporting pictures began to annoy him, though he developed an uncanny skill at catching knockouts.

One night, or rather, early one morning—he was coming home late—had had a few drinks, out playing cards—and a man came running down the street—had a mail-order automatic in his hand. Joe ducked behind an L pillar. With the newspaper man's extraordinary acuteness, Joe didn't ask the runner whether he had by any chance bitten a dog but concluded that he might be news anyway. Just as the fugitive went by, Joe's camera flashed; so did the automatic, but criminals are notoriously poor marksmen.

Joe lost no time in going in the opposite direction and consequently was able to make a nice picture of a dying policeman, and of the same policeman covered by a tarpaulin. He didn't say anything about the other shot till he got back to the office. All three developed beautifully and he took them in to the night editor in a hurry That gentleman looked at them and mentioned a few Biblical characters; he brought them down to Headquarters himself.

Oh, yes, Headquarters recognized the man with the gun and probably concluded that it was now time to arrest him. They got him in a place over on San Juan Hill, and presently he was telling a lot of things in the confident hope that he'd escape the hot seat of which he was somewhat callously reminded from time to time.

The paper printed all three pictures and more than one of the *Picture Bulletin* readers looked at the back page for a minute before they flipped it over to look at the lady acrobats or the stern looking gentleman in the polka dot muffler demonstrating what the well dressed man will wear.

After that Joe went out looking for excitement rather than for assignments. He found it too, with the luck that made him habitually fill up the two pair that no amount of preliminary raising would induce him to throw away. Story after story. He stumbled into them, he went after them; if necessary, he'd embellish them, not actionably.

ONE day his boss said to him:

"Joe, you know what I think? I think if I were you I'd get out of here for a while. Now look here: After that story you did about the chicken pullers' strike, you couldn't show your face in Hoboken. Then I send you up to that clambake and you bring back a picture of Honest Waldo Kerrigan lying dead drunk on the life preservers. We didn't use it, of course. Then the silk thieves, and the Kid Banger gang. It's getting so there's whole sections of the city where I couldn't use you. Remember how you got the head beat off you in the Commonwealth Hotel? And then there was that funeral, when the cops took the camera away from you."

"And how!" said Joe. "I got a swell picture of that bridegroom up at the Commonwealth."

"Yes, but listen, Joe. Naturally, we have to get the news, but you, gee, you're getting crazy. First thing you know, somebody'll bump you off. I'm not kidding you. I mean it."

"It's a hot day," said Joe. "You keep still and I'll bring you a nice piece of ice to put on your head. Say, listen, Mac. How'd it be if you'd send me out to do a series on that lady evangelist, huh? I could do one on those Mex towns, too, huh?"

"Get the ice and put it on your own head," said Mac.

Joe compromised. He took two weeks vacation. Didn't know what to do with it. He went up to Boston first and made a picture or two of Helen Wills at Longwood. Thought he'd go up to Canada and do some fishing and so on. So he went up to a little town above Halifax, on the coast—it wasn't Dover, but that will do. It's a fishing village, really, all whitewashed houses; has one hotel where hardly any one ever stays, except some

lunatic who thinks swordfishing must be fun. Joe arrived there in the rain, and it rained all the next day. However, they had the best lobster and scallops and Scotch that any one could want. Joe wasn't so fond of scallops.

He looked for books, but E. D. E. N. Southworth and Wilkie Collins didn't suit Joe. However, there was a photograph album, and he made for it. He was interested in daguerreotypes and he knew that there was stuff produced back in the forties that no one could do today, even if there were a market. This album didn't run very far back, just into the seventies or eighties, maybe, and very mediocre stuff—the usual dull family record.

Pasted in on the corner of one page was a little sketch that looked as if it might have come from the old Sunday *Sun*, "Snapper Durnell at Saratoga." Joe stared at this, and he began to look more closely. Sure enough, there were two pictures of a little boy—in a long trousers suit and funny looking shoes, first, and then a little later one, taken when the victim was about thirteen or fourteen. They looked a good deal like the sketch.

Snapper Durnell is a person you never heard of, just as the town wasn't Dover. Maybe you've heard of Snapper Garrison and Tod Sloan and Earle Sande and Walter Miller. Well, Snapper Durnell wasn't any of these boys either, but he could have ridden against the four of them and not claimed any apprentice allowance.

Joe set out to learn how Snapper Durnell's picture came to be in the family album of people whose name was Cross. Two old ladies, they were, unmarried. One of them claimed to know nothing about it, but he had more luck with the other.

Snapper Durnell was their brother. He had left home early and taken his devious course to the States, where for some reason he had changed his name. They hadn't heard from him for a long time, when suddenly he sent them a hundred American dollars and told them who he was getting to be. His mother had cut this print out of a paper, or else he sent it to her. He wrote infrequently, sometimes sending money, and once asking for five hundred dollars, which he got.

"After that, we didn't hear from him for years, but he wrote to us about eighteen months after mother died. He sent us the five hundred dollars. That's about ten years ago now. Since then we hear from him occasionally. But, Mr. Hawkes, don't mention his name to my sister. She thinks he's disgraced us. The Crosses were gentlemen riders, of course, over in Hants, but this— She's very proud of our family; we all are."

Whereupon, Joe had to listen to much meandering about the famous Cross family, which went big with him. Finally he managed to shoot in a question or two. Snapper Durnell was in business in the States, in Maxwell, New Hampshire. His right name was Harry Jeremiah Cross.

So when the rain stopped, Joe didn't go fishing after all. He took some pictures of the hotel and the old ladies and the fishing village and went back to Boston. His researches then took him to the newspaper files of a library, where after a couple of days he was able to verify some vague notions. Snapper Durnell had passed his heyday and was set down a couple of times by the stewards and finally, at Louisville, was ruled off the turf for life. Whereupon he went to Australia and to France, and did some riding, and got into more difficulties. Then no more of Snapper Durnell. That's the fascination of newspaper reports—the stories have no end. Not a desirable thing for a magazine though. All right.

JOE went to Maxwell, New Hampshire. He found Harry Jeremiah Cross, dealer in hardware, a short, pudgy man, well along in life. Joe bought a few things for very little money, as you can do in a hardware store. Mr. Cross wasn't busy, so Joe had quite a chat with him. Mr. Cross was married, had three fine sons, one an attorney, another a teller in the bank, the third one still in high school, end on the football team. Mr. Cross was enthusiastic about football.

Joe tried hard to pursue the sporting topics, but Mr. Cross was elusive.

"No, sir. Mr. Hart? Hawkes, oh, yes. I'll tell you. I've joined the church. I don't say that I never gambled, but since I got married, I've never touched a card or bet on a—bet on any sort of sport. I tell you, Mr. Hawkes, it's wrong—wrong. It brings disgrace on families. It's worse than drink. I wouldn't want one of my sons, or my wife, to know that I ever did it, even when I was a young man. Even as much as I've said to you, I never said to them. It's a curse, gambling, and no good can come of it."

"The old hypocrite," thought Joe. "Suppose I tell him what I know. Suppose I say 'All right, Snapper'."

But he didn't. He managed by some pretext—he considered himself subtle at pretexts—to get a nice picture of Mr. Harry J. Cross, erstwhile Snapper Durnell, and before he left town he wandered out to the high school field and got one of his son.

Going back to his hotel, Joe wrote the story as the *Daily Picture Bulletin* would like it. The old home in Nova Scotia, the fishermen, the young scapegrace going to Boston, to New York, to Pimlico, to Lexington, to Sydney, to Cannes. His triumphs—his failures—his disgrace. The hardware store. His present place in the community. And pictures, pictures, pictures. He called it "Snapper Durnell Joins the Church—Famous Jockey Hardware Prince in New Hampshire." He got the layout all ready in a Manila envelope and put the stamps on it. When he got to the mail box, he held the stuff in his hand for a minute, as if some peculiar notion were occupying him.

You said it, Mr. Dana. When a man bites a dog, that's news.

JUNGLE JEWELS

By TOM CURRY

THE BOAT beached in the mud, and the big man in the bow stepped past the peon paddler and climbed the bank. Behind him came another, a tall young fellow in tropical clothes and a cork helmet.

Both were engineers, the advance guard of the oil men of the Maracaibo fields.

The older man, in the lead, had a four day stubble; his assistant had shaved not more than two days before, the tropical fever not yet having entered his blood.

It was an emergency expedition. There were six boats, all handled by small Venezuelans, peons, and several Americans. But Barclay, the big engineer, was in charge. He was an hour ahead of the second boat.

"Thank God it's all over," he growled, He gazed about him at the terrible destruction. Fire had been here, fire which had seared and roared in the mighty jungle. For a half mile square every living bush and tree had been exposed to the terrific heat of an oil fire.

"Holy mackerel! It was some bonfire," exclaimed Thomas, the assistant.

They had come prepared to fight fire. It did not disappoint them to find that the holocaust had burned itself out.

The spot was many miles from Lake Maracaibo, the center of the oil basin. Rumors of an immense fire had come to the offices of the company. Barclay had been sent out at once; for damages done by the company would have to be made good.

Barclay walked into the white ashes. The fire had burned down to the river edge. On the side of the water it had been held, but it had spread well into the forest. It would have gone much

A tale of Venezuela and black gold

farther, but for an intervening swamp that had acted as a fire break.

Desolation reigned here, and utter stillness. The peons, awed by the spectacle of the dead monster, remained close to the boats.

"It didn't look much like this when I was here a year ago," said Barclay as he walked into the ankle deep ashes. "'Twas virgin jungle then. I came in here with Johnny Smythe, and we had to cut our way with *machetes* to survey the damn' place. God, it must have been a fire!"

They searched among the ashes for some time. The other boats had beached and more men came to join the hunt.

"Here's where they put the hole down," said Barclay at last.

Twisted, disintegrating iron, remains of casing and pipe, the scarred cylinders of a gasoline engine and various other instruments showed where the drilling had been done.

Nearby, they found charred bones—bones of men and beasts. The young Thomas was sickened.

"God, it must have been horrible!" he said weakly.

"Must have blown in on 'em," said the cool Barclay. "Some damn' fool prob'ly dropped a match. Funny, though; Jim Roberts was the best driller we had. He never made a mistake like this before. Poor ole Jim. Oh well, that's the way it goes. There's no telling how many hundred thousand barrels were lost. I doubt if it'll be worth while working this concession for a year or two. The company will just have to stand the loss. God knows whether there's any pressure left."

They called the superstitious peons and made them collect the skeletons of the burned bodies. A small boat, rotting on

the opposite bank of the river, caused Barclay and Thomas to make a survey there. A few yards back, in the bush, they stumbled on two more skeletons, with the skulls detached from the bodies.

"Now how the hell did these get here?" cried Thomas.

Barclay shook his head.

"Must have crawled here and died," he said. "Or maybe the Indians got 'em. It's lousy with Indians round here."

SIX MONTHS before, at the spot where the two engineers, Barclay and Thomas, had landed, another boat was beached.

A tall, powerful, sunburnt man, with lean, fever beaten cheeks, broad shoulders and gray stubble on his face, stepped to the land. He was well over six feet, a man of iron. His washed out blue eyes were stern and strong. He wore khaki trousers and shirt and canvas puttees, a Texan's hat on his head. He was gray at the temples. This was Jim Roberts, chief driller of the expedition.

In the same boat with him, following closely on his heels, was his assistant, Sam McGrew. McGrew was as tall as Roberts but much heavier. He was a great giant of a fellow with a black beard and long black hair, black eyes and a big nose. A short pipe stuck from one corner of his mouth. He acted as blacksmith and also as driller when Roberts wished to be relieved.

Peons, little, swarthy men, swarmed about them, working at this and that. Roberts gave short, succinct orders. They obeyed him implicitly. He was all powerful, the man god. Many of the supplies were already stored in the clearing, arrived by ox team and tractor which had started long before the rafts and boats and had cut a tortuous way through the jungle.

The lush jungle swayed about them. The hot sun beat on the tops of the high trees, and monkeys screeched in the branches. Birds of brilliant plumage flitted to and fro; life was abundant here.

They were far, comparatively, from civilization. The terrible jungle trail, cut up by rain and the tractors' passage, was practically impassable now; the river trip took four days. An airplane might reach them easily, but there was no landing place within many miles.

On the shoulders of the taciturn Roberts rested the success or failure of the expedition. A great company had sent him, a trusted driller and proved man, to wrest an oil field from the immense jungle. There was a small clearing already made by the transportation gangs. But more space would be necessary. The derrick would be carved of wood from the jungle.

Another man, an American, came up to Roberts, who was standing with McGrew at his side, watching the peons work. Tents were being pitched and a place to cook was in preparation.

The third man was a young fellow, not more than twenty-four, tall, slim, with the enthusiasm of youth in his eyes. This was Darvey, derrick man of the outfit. He had stringy brown hair, blue eyes and a weak chin.

"Conchita fell in," he said when he reached Roberts.

"Yeh?" said the chief driller. "Did she get hurt?"

"No. I carried her to shore."

"Well—have a fire built and let her get dry. 'Twon't hurt her any."

A daughter of the peons straggled up to Roberts. She was evidently in distress. Her clothes were wet with the muddy water of the river.

She was pretty, about fifteen years of age, with the black straight hair of her race and large dark eyes. She was small, and her slim figure showed through her damp clothes.

Roberts she loved, without doubt, with the devotion of an animal. She waited for him to speak. It was he who had brought her into the jungle with him.

He gave her a short nod of his head. She said nothing, but went in the direction of the fire. It was very hot; but she was thin blooded. She shivered as she squatted beside the flames.

THERE were a thousand details to which Roberts must attend. Assisted by McGrew and Darvey, who showed the peons how to work, temporary camp was made.

Roberts cursed tersely.

"Damn' lazy bums! Never do their work right."

He referred to the transportation gang that had brought in most of the supplies and then departed. No barracks had been constructed, nor had wood been cut for the derrick. This meant delay in starting the drilling.

The building of the rig, rough barracks for the peons, a shack for Roberts and another for the blacksmith and the derrick man took several days. The rig was the only carefully constructed piece of work. The buildings were made of rough wood, cracks partially filled with mud, canvas spread over the roofs.

The girl Conchita lived with Roberts.

Roberts was a rough fellow, but strong and of single purpose. He was one of the best drillers the company had. If there were oil beneath that green, rotting vegetation, then Roberts would tap it. McGrew was rough, too; ignorant, obedient. The derrick man Darvey was of more education, but life in the oil fields had hardened him and made him reckless.

FOR many days they worked, cursing and sweating in the tropical heat. The clearing had widened. The derrick threw its tapering, headless neck into the sky and the ground was beaten down by the tramping of many feet.

One object shone in Roberts' eyes—the finding of oil. He rushed his men, worked them hard. He would not fail. He was honest, was Roberts. Well paid, given large bonuses for his splendid work, he had no inclination to betray his company. And he would not have done so under any provocation. It was the oil he loved.

The engineers who had first prospected the concession had marked off the place where the driller should dig into the bowels of the earth.

At last Roberts was ready. The pulleys and crown block were in place, the engine mounted, the draw works in position with drum and cable. Setting up was a weary process; but finally it was done.

The kelly, some thirty feet long, was dragged up, a bit screwed in the end and then the whole apparatus lowered through the hole in the derrick floor. With chain tongs the kelly was turned until fifteen feet of mud had been taken out. A piece of casing was put in, the rat hole made, and then they placed the rotary table.

A twenty-four inch bit was screwed on the end of the kelly and, after forty feet had been made, the surface casing was set and cemented. During the days they were forced to wait for this to harden, they worked on the improvement of the camp.

Finally the impatient Roberts, rushing the work, was able to start drilling in earnest. Drill stem was started and the rotary began to turn. Up on the fourble board, seventy-five feet in the air, young Darvey, naked to the waist, the sweat and mud running down his brown body, cursed as he wrestled with the wet pipe.

They struck rock strata and McGrew, as blacksmith, was busy dressing bits.

It was a long task, and a gamble at the end. The oil might be anywhere within a thousand to twenty-five hundred feet below—or there might be no flow to tap in that spot. A duster would mean the loss of many hundreds of thousands of dollars by the company. And Roberts had a certain pride in his work.

AT FIRST, during the heavy work, the two aides, McGrew and Darvey, had been too occupied to be quarrelsome. They were a little afraid of Roberts, anyway; he kept more or less aloof from them. He was the boss, the big chief. The peons worshiped him. McGrew and Darvey respected him because of his efficiency.

But the two were inherently devils. Near Maracaibo, where they could let off steam by going to town and getting into trouble, they were good workmen, and

obedient. McGrew had been in the jungle before, but not so far; and he had not been in contact with a man of Darvey's imagination. Darvey, while younger, was the leader of the two. His smattering of education and his wider knowledge led the older McGrew to look up to him.

In Maracaibo they might have played many more or less harmless pranks together, McGrew led on by Darvey. But out here in the jungle the combination was dangerous.

Periodic fever came on them, days when they shivered in the blazing sun. They grew restless. Roberts refused to allow them to souse themselves in whisky and kept them in hand. Probably the veteran driller had anticipated something of this when he had kept aloof from them in the first place. He was able to hold them in their places more easily now.

Roberts himself was steady, used to this sort of life. He was older, he had Conchita with him and he had an interest in the new well.

One evening, after a hard day's work on the fourble board, young Darvey went down to the river to wash out a shirt. The peons were in their barracks, jabbering and cooking bananas. McGrew was lying in the shack, reading a two months' old paper. Roberts was not in sight.

Darvey was feeling miserable and sick of the whole business. He longed for excitement, excitement of the town. Already a thousand dollars in wages was waiting for him in the Maracaibo bank, ready to be spent for wine, women and wassail. The young man cursed as he stumbled across a log and stepped into the water with one foot. He scrambled out on the bank, took off his shoes and waded in to wash the shirt.

Then he saw the girl Conchita watching him. She was seated near by, looking at the water.

Darvey's heart leaped. He stood motionless for a moment, staring at her. She returned his gaze with wide black eyes. Then she looked away again. She was a dumb little thing; but to Darvey just then she seemed a most wonderful creature. He threw his khaki shirt to the ground and stepped up on the bank beside her.

"Hello, 'Chita. How's the kid?" he said in English.

" 'Allo."

She knew little English. Darvey spoke to her for a minute in mixed Spanish and English. Once she smiled; but she was frightened. She pushed him away, and this angered the derrick man. He cursed her loudly and tried to kiss her; but just at that moment Roberts stepped up behind him and pushed him roughly aside.

"Go back to the camp," ordered Roberts, to the girl.

She rose obediently and went silently through the trees toward camp.

"Let her alone," ordered Roberts, more gently than Darvey had expected.

He stared the derrick man down and turned on his heel, leaving the angry Darvey to brood over the event.

Darvey told McGrew of the episode. McGrew laughed and swore roundly.

"She's a peach of a kid," he growled.

He pulled his black beard. The idea had been put in his head.

The jungle made men hate one another. The jungle made men hate themselves. It was cruel, and it seemed to laugh. So it appeared to young Darvey. The duller McGrew hated it, too; but Darvey voiced the hatred.

ONE MORNING, Roberts, before starting work, crossed the river to search for a marauding jaguar that had frightened the peons during the night. The driller had been awakened and had fired several shots at fiery eyes in the darkness. A trail of dried blood led to the water, and Roberts intended to follow it, to see if he could catch up with the animal.

McGrew, the great black giant, had been watching ever since Darvey had put the idea of the girl in his head. He followed her when she went to the river to watch Roberts cross the stream. Darvey saw him and guessed what he was about,

so he sneaked after his friend and waited in the bush.

The big blacksmith used no finesse. He pulled the girl to him and kissed her. She screamed piercingly; and Roberts, not yet far away, came running along the other side of the river bank. He came across and hurried to the girl's side. The gorillalike McGrew glared defiantly at his leader.

"Let her alone," said Roberts, just as he had to Darvey.

"You go to hell," growled McGrew.

Roberts frowned. He had sensed insubordination, and now it had come. But he was ready for it.

"Get back to camp," he said, advancing.

"You go to hell," said McGrew again. "Who d' you think y' are, hey?"

"Boss of this outfit," said Roberts. "I'll give you one more chance, Mac. Go back to camp."

For a moment McGrew hesitated. He seemed about to obey. But then Darvey laughed, from the thicket where he watched. McGrew flushed red under his black beard and stood his ground.

"You go to hell."

Roberts came closer and struck the big fellow. A trickle of blood started down the black beard. With the roar of a maddened bull, McGrew threw his great weight at Roberts.

McGrew was forty pounds heavier than Roberts; but the driller struck him at will. A blow in the right eye closed that member; Roberts' lean fists sunk into the big man's flesh time after time. McGrew, roaring all the while, tried to come to grips with the driller.

Neither man was afraid. Both were rough and tumble fighters, used to this sort of conflict.

But Roberts was the master. For twenty minutes they fought round and round. At last McGrew, blinded by blood, his face a mass of bruises where Roberts' fists had landed, managed to get the driller round the waist.

Roberts got his hand under the big man's chin and pushed with all his might, In spite of the giant's crushing embrace. the driller strained and held his lungs filled with air, to ward off the viselike grip. Then he managed to reach the blacksmith's trouser leg, and tripped the big man, pushing still on McGrew's chin. McGrew fell over backward, and Roberts landed on him, with his knee in the big fellow's stomach. McGrew, with a grunt and curse, stopped fighting. He was beaten.

WHEN McGrew recovered from this beating he felt better. He admired Roberts for his prowess. But Darvey, who hated Roberts now, fanned McGrew's former dislike back to life. The two became bosom friends, plotters against the authority of the driller. But they let Conchita severely alone.

The peons were aware of the beatings Roberts had given the two, a physical one to McGrew and a mental one to Darvey. Sometimes the derrick man caught smiles exchanged among the little men. McGrew and he bullied the peons.

Roberts was making footage. With him, that was the main point in life. And McGrew and Darvey aided. They had worked hard, in spite of their growing hatred for the driller, for they had no other object. Up on the fourble board in the blazing sun, Darvey wrestled and cursed at the slippery drill stem. McGrew sharpened bits and helped Roberts at the engine. The little peons labored mightily.

The rotary turned, the bit drove into the rock.

McGrew and Darvey grew closer than ever. They often cursed Roberts together.

After they had worked their tower they would clean up as well as they could and, after eating and having a drink, they would talk, or read old papers. Women was their main theme; criticism of Roberts came next.

One morning, after many weeks of terrific work, Roberts decided to set the casing. They had reached eleven hundred feet. This made it necessary to stop for a few days while the cement hardened. McGrew had sharpened his bits

in the cool of the morning; Darvey had washed some clothes, shaved off a week's stubble and cleaned up in general.

There was an hour before the midday meal, and the big blacksmith and the derrick man wandered off together toward the outskirts of the clearing. In all the weeks they had been there they had never ventured far beyond the camp.

The two, aimlessly strolling, broke into the trees and followed the path of least resistance. There was heavy underbrush, and large lianas above; many parrots and monkeys were in the aerial paths.

"There's Indians round here," said Darvey. "They hunt in this section. We don't want to get too far away."

"To hell with them!" growled McGrew. "I could kill a whole tribe."

"Yeh, they're cowards, that's true," agreed Darvey, "but just the same, they shoot poison arrows and if one gets you you swell up and rot."

"To hell with them!" said McGrew again.

They rested on a fallen log. McGrew smoked his short pipe and stared up at a gray monkey who scolded at them furiously from the safety of an aerial root. Darvey put his head in his hands and looked at the ground.

"God, I'd like to be back in Maracaibo," sighed the derrick man. "Boy, I could drink every saloon in the place dry! Wonder how that French kid, Marie, 's getting along?"

McGrew cursed.

"Shut up! What's the use wonderin'? We kin git outa here soon's we strike the old petroleo."

"Damn oil! To hell with oil; wish it was all in the ocean!" growled Darvey. "Damn Roberts, curse his heart and soul, I'd like to kick his face in! He got the company to send me out here. Sure. And you, too, McGrew."

"Aw, I wanted to come. I was a damn' fool, just because I got double wages!"

McGREW spat; Darvey's eyes followed its path. McGrew rose, picked up a stone and shied it at the noisy monkey. He stooped over again to pick up another, but seemed suddenly to lose interest in this. He remained bent over, and presently he rose and with knit brows came toward the derrick man, who was watching him lazily.

"Lookit! What the hell?"

The big blacksmith held out his gnarled, stubby fingered hand. In the rough palm lay a hexagonal piece of clear mineral, and a ray of sunlight, filtering through the lianas and foliage, struck it, causing it to glitter magnificently.

Darvey stared at it for a moment. Then he snatched the thing from McGrew's hand and examined it closely. A moment later, and he was cursing furiously, crawling on his hands and knees in the bush.

"Here's another, different shape, but bigger!" cried the derrick man. "My God, McGrew, help me! We got to see if there's any more."

The blacksmith was puzzled by the actions of Darvey, but he obediently began searching the ground. Presently he dug out another chunk of the flashing substance, and called to Darvey.

Then they seated themselves; and Darvey, holding the objects in his hand, looked at them with wide open eyes.

"My God! They're diamonds, Mac."

McGrew was startled, but sceptical.

"The hell you say!"

"Sure. Why not? Man, all this country is utterly unproved, except for oil. It's virgin. Over in Colombia they get the biggest emeralds in the world; there's gold in Guiana and so many diamonds in Brazil they ain't begun to discover all the fields! Why not here, hey? These are diamonds; I'll sell my soul if they're not!"

"Holy mackerel!" exclaimed McGrew. "Diamonds! Say, we oughta git rich, Darvey. Le's go tell Roberts right away. To hell with oil when there's diamonds around."

McGrew was several yards away, running to tell the chief driller of their great find when Darvey's imperative voice stopped him.

"Don't be a damn' fool," cried the derrick man impatiently.

McGrew turned and slowly came back.

"Why tell that son of a gun? Don't say a word, Mac. We'll keep it to ourselves."

"Aw right," said McGrew slowly. "Guess you're right. No use lettin' that dog in on it."

"No, sure not. Has he ever done us a favor? Anyways, most of these diamonds will be under the surface; have to dig for 'em. It'll take time and capital, but we can get it easy on the strength of showin' these, see? Maybe we can find some more. But if we go tell Roberts, he'll tell the company; he's just that honest a fool! Sure, I know him. He'd get a split and we'd not get anything save maybe a thousand bucks or so. Roberts don't care for anything but oil; he intends strikin' it here. He'd put his well down first and then he'd report to the company there's diamonds here. Then we'd be out. They rightfully belong to us, because we discovered 'em, but remember, the company owns the mineral rights on this concession. Course, we'll need backin' and equipment, Mac. We couldn't come out here and dig alone, because of the Indians, see? But we can get it all right."

McGrew fell in with his leader's plans at once. They shook hands and swore to stick together.

"How the hell will we ever get this concession, though?" said McGrew.

"Leave that to me," said Darvey. "I'll figure out a way. You keep your mouth shut, Mac."

THE FINDING of the precious stones brought into the lives of McGrew and Darvey a new, intensely interesting object, the enriching of themselves. The derrick man made a small bag of cloth and put the stones in it, fastening the bag in his trousers' pocket. In undertones the two discoverers plotted, McGrew frankly confessing he couldn't "figger out how," but Darvey, with more imagination, hopeful.

Next day the two again strolled out to the spot where they had picked up the gems. They were now afraid of being followed, and looked behind them carefully to make sure they were unobserved. The peons were lounging in the sun, jabbering and smoking, their *machetes*, which seldom left them, stretched near by. Roberts, the chief driller, was writing a report in his shack, and the girl Conchita was sunning her damp hair, which she had just washed.

The two broke into the jungle and presently came to the spot where they had found the stones. They began a systematic search of the ground, and they picked up another sparkling gem within an hour. Darvey placed it in the bag.

"God, it's rich. We'll be millionaires, Mac. We'll stick together on this."

McGrew said again—

"I can't figger out how we'll git the concession, Darvey."

"Well, I can," said Darvey slowly, "and I have. Are you with me to the end, Mac?"

"Sure I am."

"This is the way, then," said the derrick man, enjoying the display of his brains. "The company has sent this expedition out as a feeler into its new territory, Suppose we hit a duster, what'll happen?"

"Suppose we don't?" said McGrew. "The mud smellers don't make a report on dry ground."

"No, but they miss a good many times, Mac. You hear about the gushers, but they keep quiet about the dry holes. It don't sell stock. If Roberts fails here, it'll mean the company's out a hell of a wad of dough. What'll they do? They'll prob'ly sell off the concession cheap to make up some for the loss. That's the way they work. An' no oil company'll come in here, if they think the drift's too deep. See?"

But McGrew did not see.

"I don't see how the hell you figger it. Just as good a chanct of Roberts bringin' in a hundred thousan' well as a duster."

Darvey waved his hand impatiently.

"Listen, Mac. We ain't gonna give Roberts a chance to bring any well in. You see? We'll delay him and hold him back till the company gets sore and calls him in. That'll do just as well. There's

just so much equipment here. If we don't strike oil within a fixed time, then the company quits."

McGrew was beginning to understand.

"You mean we'll throw a wrench in th' works?"

"Sure. It'll be easy. I can waste two or three hours a day for him and so can you, Mac. Give him dull bits, slow him up. We can ruin this expedition. We can make Roberts fail, and then we get backin' in Maracaibo, on the quiet, and buy this concession dirt cheap. It's easy to mine diamonds. You just dig a pit. I've read about it. Why, over in Brazil they got big mines, Mac; right over the mountains, in Colombia, they find the best emeralds in the world. This is Venezuela, but it's all the same country. It's rich in all kinds of minerals. I bet we strike all sort of stones once we get started."

THE CASING had been set, and Roberts, indomitable, the man who always got oil, was turning the rotary again. The lean powerful driller shouted directions above the firing of the engine and the dull *thud-thud* of the drill.

He was coming out of the hole to change bits. On the fourble board above him was the derrick man, Darvey. The traveling block came swinging down, and the peons started to work with their tongs to break the drill stem. Up went the drill stem, eighty feet; Darvey reaching out, grasped the slippery iron and almost lost his footing. The drill stem clanged and swung. Roberts looked up and cursed roundly. Darvey was skillful as a rule. Finally, the drill stem was racked.

Slowly, the drill stem was pulled from the hole again, broken below; and Darvey, delaying matters, racked it as badly as he could. Roberts was out of temper by the time the pipe was completely racked and he cursed angrily.

"You slow donkey," he shouted, shaking his fist up at Darvey.

Finally the bit appeared, dulled by its battle with the rock twelve hundred feet below. It was detached from the drill stem, and the mighty McGrew started to take it to his forge, set under a shed near by.

But McGrew was clumsy and, while Roberts swore at him, neglected to bring up a new bit till the frantic driller rushed at him and completed the task himself. The lowering of the drill stem was not finished that day.

But delay as they would, the two could not seriously hold back the great driller. He forced his bit down into the bowels of the earth, in spite of everything. He did a great deal of the work of the two himself, cursed them, threatened them with physical punishment and bullied them on. Guilty of conscience, they dared not fight back.

McGrew sharpened bits so that they grew dull quickly; Roberts took a hand there and supervised him as he worked. The driller forced them to work overtime, so that he could make "hole."

For it was as Darvey had said; this was a gamble on the part of the company, and a set time had been given the driller for the putting down of the well. If he struck oil within that period, well and good; if the difficulties proved too great, then he lost his bonus and share, and the company would either sell off the inland concession, or hold it till some time in the future.

The mighty Roberts, indomitable, forced them on. Down, down the bit went into the rock, toward the oil the driller knew was there. They could not hold him up seriously. They feared Roberts' strength of purpose and will and, in spite of the great stakes they played for, did not dare openly to defy him.

They struck fourteen hundred feet, and McGrew was whining that it was impossible; unless they brought in a dry hole, Roberts would hit the oil well within the necessary time—and win.

"The hell you say!" growled Darvey. "If he gets much farther, I'll fix him."

The young derrick man was desperate. The flash of diamonds had struck his

brain, illuminating it with visions of vast wealth. The two gloated over it together in the jungle.

THEY reached fifteen hundred feet. Roberts, his eyes shining with the fever of oil, the man whose single purpose was to force the petroleum from the earth, willy nilly, pushed on.

Besides oil, nothing in the world counted with the driller. For thirty years he had been at this business, a fighter all the way from the beginning. He had tapped the flowing gold in all parts of the earth. He was rich; he was faithful to his trust; but it was the oil he loved, this mighty god which he had seen take possession of the nations of the earth. The whole world cried aloud for oil, its vital drink.

Fever, swamps, rock, mountains, water, impossible tasks—all these Roberts had conquered to obtain oil.

So it was that the two plotters whose interest in oil was now dwarfed to nothingness by the shining stones they had found had difficulty in hampering him to the extent that they had hoped. The sun blazed down on them; the jungle steamed. Indians were about them, but did not dare attack such a large party. Roberts had fought them in the interior before and had beaten them; he did not fear them. In fact, he feared nothing save that he would not reach oil. And he knew he would reach oil.

Conchita, the girl, was nothing to him save an incident in his race for oil. The peons were only tools to him; McGrew and Darvey, more important tools, but still only of interest because of the oil.

It was this phase of character that had made of Jim Roberts the best driller in the country, a man who could command his own price. And, as often happened, the money he got was only incidental to him. He scarcely knew how much wealth was piled up for him in Maracaibo, and he cared less. He loved oil.

Once he had struck it in this place he would lose interest, unless the company wanted another well put down. But another driller could do that as well. Roberts was the pioneer, the unbeatable man.

"YEH, MAC," said Darvey, cursing hard, as they talked together in their shack, after supper. "We got to stop him. He'll strike the old petroleo sure as fire! I've pretty nearly killed myself fifty times pretendin' to slip off the fourble board."

"An' me," growled McGrew. "I thought he'd kill me t'day when I handed him that dull bit."

"We got to stop him, that's all," said Darvey again.

He whispered his next words. McGrew, hardened in the ways of the world, rough, uncouth, yet was still something of an oil man. At first he shook his head. But at last he agreed.

The night was dark. The camp slumbered peacefully. Far off some giant feline howled in despair or hunger. The wooden derrick stood majestically rearing its bulk into the black sky.

Two figures crept across the clearing from the direction of the shacks. They approached the derrick and worked quietly. Above hung pieces of drill stem, left racked the day before. There came several short raps, the clank or iron and then a heavy dull thud.

Then the two men went back as they had come. A moment later, reaching their shack, Darvey and McGrew began firing into the night and shouting. In an instant the camp was in an uproar. Roberts, the chief driller, came running from his shack in his pajamas, clutching a rifle in his hand.

"What's up?" he roared.

Darvey ran over to him. The peons were awake, and several stood outside the barracks, holding their long *machetes*.

"Somebody was foolin' round the derrick," said Darvey to the driller. "McGrew woke up and heard 'em. He woke me, and we went out and saw some guys foolin' round the well. Must have been Indians. They beat it, and we fired after 'em."

Roberts lighted several lanterns. The clearing was illuminated weirdly, as searching men, walking slowly and fearing an arrow or spear might come from the jungle at any moment, made the rounds.

The driller's first thought was for his well. He went there at once and stood on the floor. Suddenly he let out a scream of anguish.

"My God! They've dropped the drill stem down the hole!"

For fifteen minutes the driller cursed heaven and earth. He dashed about like a wild man. McGrew and Darvey, their consciences pricking them, fear on them because they thought Roberts would guess who had perpetrated this deed, kept as far from him as possible.

The tears streamed down the great driller's leathery face. The girl Conchita cowered near by, the peons retired to their barracks and shivered.

But the rage of the driller finally ran its course. He retired to his shack and, for the rest of the night, the wakeful McGrew and Darvey heard him stamping about, cursing now and then.

AT THE first streaks of dawn in the tropic sky Roberts was at the well, fishing for his string of tools with a grab hook on the end of a cable. He worked without cessation, from early morning till late afternoon—and at last he won. Through perseverance and luck he managed to draw the top of the drill stem to the derrick floor, where tongs gripped it.

His face black with grime, his clothing ripped and torn, his hands cut and bloody, Roberts grinned happily, showing his buck teeth. He slapped Darvey on the back, the first act of real comradeship he had shown.

"We beat 'em, kid!" he said with an oath.

Darvey tried to look pleased. But McGrew and he bit their nails and in agony watched the preparations Roberts made to start drilling again on the morrow.

"It's sure hell!" groaned Darvey. "Think of it! All those sparklers, and only we know about 'em. And we gotta help Roberts make this land so valuable we'll never get it!"

"Curse his heart and soul," growled McGrew.

Roberts had noticed their poor work, of course; but he had put it down to the effect of the steaming jungle. The weather was hot. The rainy season would be due before long; then their shacks would be flooded and they must work harder to mud up the water flows they encountered.

"He's the luckiest guy I ever knew," said Darvey to his partner. "Imagine him getting that string of tools after we dropped it! It don't happen once out of three times, Mac."

"I know it," replied McGrew. "Hell! Guess we'll not be able to beat him after all."

"The devil you say," cried Darvey, his eyes lighted evilly. "I'll beat him now, if it kills me. I'm goin' all the way, Mac. Are you with me?"

McGrew nodded his big black head. He hated Roberts more than ever. Darvey took care to keep this feeling fanned.

But Roberts forced them on. He dominated the whole camp; it was he who forced them to work from dawn till night. For a full week they were too weary to go to the spot where they had found the diamonds.

The vision of wealth had become an obsession with the two. In the lonely jungle, racked by fevers and the heat, working like madmen under the indefatigable driller, the two spent their resting time in dreams. They dreamed of Maracaibo, of women, wine and civilization; Darvey conjured up word pictures of New York, even Paris. McGrew, less imaginative, was thrilled by the visions of the younger man.

The girl Conchita kept clear of them; they hated her, too, because she was close to Roberts. The peons, who could stand the climate because they were native to it, worked in their usual way, doing just what was set before them.

One of them, called Juan, or John, a

grizzled fellow with a long gray mustache and a round head, acted as foreman. He did no heavy work, but seemed to be a favorite of Roberts'. He took care of the driller's clothes, helping Conchita.

The derrick man and the blacksmith knew only what they saw of Roberts. He still kept aloof from them, and it was well that he did. For they might have rebelled long since, had he allowed them familiarity. They feared him as much as they hated him. Once McGrew kicked old John, the peon, and Roberts, near by, came over to the blacksmith.

"Don't bother John," he said quietly. "He's a pet of mine."

So McGrew was as cruel—behind Roberts' back—as possible, to the old peon. But John kept well out of his way. John was with the girl Conchita a great deal. Darvey noticed this and commented on it.

"Prob'ly her bodyguard, to snitch to Roberts if we get fresh again," said Darvey.

But the diamonds were what interested them, and how to stop Roberts from striking the petroleum.

"Sixteen hundred!"

Roberts was in fine fettle.

"She'll blow in before long, boys!"

Already he was preparing the "Christmas tree", the arrangement of valves which went on the top of the casing. After the well had cleansed itself and Roberts got an idea of its capacity, he would shut it in and leave it till the company was ready to exploit the territory.

Darvey, on the fourble board, heard the driller's bellow. He groaned. McGrew, standing with arms akimbo beneath the shelter of his shanty, turned away with a black look.

"By God, we'll drop his string again tonight!" cursed Darvey. "I'll fix the rotten dog!"

McGrew nodded.

AT ONE the next morning Darvey and McGrew slunk from their shack and went into the clearing toward the rig. All seemed quiet. The derrick man had slowed up the work of racking the pipe, leaving space to drop the string. The two, their hearts beating hard, crept on to the derrick floor and began to loosen the elevators that held the string of tools suspended in the hole.

They worked undisturbed for some minutes; suddenly McGrew straightened up with a curse. A flashlight shot its rays at them and Roberts, in a terrible voice, ordered them to come out.

"By God! So it was you, eh? John told me he'd seen you sneakin' round that night—and now I've caught you!"

The two, caught in the act, stood close together. McGrew's hand wandered toward his belt, where hung a six-shooter; but Roberts, his voice filled with passion, cried:

"I'll kill you if you make another move like that, McGrew! Get into your shack, damn you!"

They moved off slowly. They were confused.

"I dropped it," whispered Darvey.

McGrew shuddered. He could almost feel the steel of Roberts' gun in the small of his back. The two entered their shack, and Roberts pulled the door to on them. They heard him calling the peons. Looking from the small window, Darvey saw the driller setting men with *machetes* in a ring about the shack.

"He's gonna take a look to see what we done," said McGrew, filling his pipe. "God help us now. He'll prob'ly shoot us when he finds the string's dropped again."

"To hell with him. He won't dare murder us," said Darvey; but he could not keep a note of anxiety from his voice.

"Well—we got our guns, anyways," said McGrew. "We kin fight it out."

A long wail came to them, a wail of rage and chagrin. Roberts had discovered the success of the two in dropping the drill stem. A moment later, and the driller burst into the shack, John the peon and others armed with *machetes* behind him.

"Damn your hearts and souls!" screamed Roberts. "You lousy dogs! I'll kill you!"

His rage was greater now, with the two as an object, than it had been when he had thought marauding Indians had done the tampering with the well. He cursed them, raised his hand to strike them.

McGrew tried to draw his pistol, but Roberts kicked it out of his hand and slapped the big fellow a terrific blow in the mouth. He threw himself at Darvey like a wild beast, knocking the derrick man off his feet and kicking him in the head and body.

"Get to hell out of here! Get out!" he screamed. "Go on, before I murder the two of you! Get out of here!"

"Where th' hell to?" growled McGrew.

"What do I care? Go on. Give 'em some rations, John, an' let 'em take their guns. Start 'em off to the lake. Damn you! Go on, before I murder you!"

The driller, exhausted by his rage, sank down in a chair, putting his face in his hands.

"Damn them!" he muttered. "Sore because of that. Sore because I protected my woman. And they drop my string of tools down the hole!" He leaped to his feet and stormed at them again.

Even then, Darvey realized relievedly that Roberts had not the slightest idea as to why they had committed the crime. The driller thought it was because of enmity aroused by his defense of Conchita.

John the peon had gone out but returned quickly with food. He shoved it into Darvey's hands.

"Go!" John the peon spoke.

They looked helplessly at the wrathful Roberts. They saw no hope there. They were being driven out into the jungle.

"Let 'em take a boat, John," said Roberts in a strangled voice. "See they get started right away."

UNDER the guard of the armed peons, with John at their head, the two men slunk off. Roberts said nothing in the way of a goodby. Their last look showed him sitting with his head in his hands, groaning.

They were allowed to take a revolver each. John, speaking no words to them, pointed out a boat, and his men launched it. The two got in, put their provisions in the bow and pushed off into the current.

"Woof," growled McGrew. "I thought we were goners. Let's row some, Darvey. It'll get us there quicker."

They rounded a bend and, looking back through the night, could no longer see the lights of the camp or John's lanterns. For perhaps an hour they floated on. Then Darvey, who had recovered his poise, began to curse.

"What are we quitting for, Mac?" he said.

"What you mean, quittin'?"

"Why, he'll not get far without us. Maybe he'll not be able to fish out that string of tools this time. Let's go back."

"He'll kill us."

"We needn't go to the camp. We can build us a shelter near by and watch what happens, see?"

"How about food?" asked McGrew, still dubious.

"There's enough here for several days. An' we can steal more from the supply shack. It'll be easy. Roberts won't stay there long, if he can't fish out his tools."

McGrew was finally convinced. The two laid on the oars and turned the boat around. Then they fought against the current until dawn broke. By that time they were almost on the camp, below it. They dragged their boat into the bushes and lay down to sleep, utterly exhausted. Darvey woke about four in the afternoon. From the direction of the clearing he heard the clanging of iron. He pushed McGrew with his foot.

The big man opened his eyes.

"What's up?"

"He's fishin'," said Darvey. "Give me some tobacco and let's eat."

At twilight they rounded the clearing and, keeping in the bush, out of sight, saw the lights of the camp.

"He won't get far without a derrick man," said Darvey. "He'll have to quit, even if he does get his tools."

They reached the spot where they had found the diamonds. Here they felt at

home. They began to build a rough shack in the dying light and had a roof of branches up by the time darkness closed in.

Toward morning the two slept a little. At dawn they were awakened by the sound of the camp. The indomitable Roberts was still fishing for his drill stem.

"God, he don't know when to quit," said McGrew, grudging admiration in his voice.

They crept through the bush to the edge of the clearing and watched the activity. Roberts had put one of the younger peons up on the fourble board and was fishing with the iron hook again.

All day they alternately slept and watched the driller working.

THE NEXT day at noon they heard Roberts' cry of triumph. His luck had held. He had managed to catch the string of tools and raise them above the floor.

"Holy mackerel!" groaned Darvey. "He's got 'em. What'll he do now?"

The driller soon showed them. He racked the drill stem, with the peon working slowly above him, Roberts calling orders to him in Spanish. Then he changed to a bit he sharpened himself and went down once more.

"Maybe we can drop it again, damn him!" said Darvey.

But though they watched all night, others watched too. In the darkness lanterns burned by the derrick, and the vague outlines of peons could be seen by the spies in the forest. Roberts was taking no more chances. He had guards at the well.

The sound of drilling awoke them—the clanging drill stem and the firing of the engine. The rotary was turning and Roberts was making footage.

"God, this is hell!" groaned Darvey.

"Damn' right! Maybe we better quit, Darvey."

"No. What, with this ground lousy with jewels? Man, I'll never quit. I'll beat the bum if it kills me."

The two went for a walk through the jungle, exploring for water and wild fruits. They pushed their way through, blazing a tree here and there so that they would not be lost.

They did not go far that day. But on the morrow they started early, frightened because they had found no spring. The river water, while drinkable, was muddy and unpalatable.

Toward noon they stumbled on the Indian encampment. Darvey saw it first through the thick bush. He stopped McGrew, and the two fell to the ground.

There were ten or twelve tents, all made of skins of wild animals. There was a community cooking fire in the center. Indian women, clad in dirty white cloth, with dirty brown babies at their breasts, lounged about. The men were out hunting, and McGrew and Darvey decided to retire at once, before the hunters should stumble on them.

"We got to watch those guys," said Darvey. "They'll cut us to pieces if they can catch us."

McGrew shook his head contemptuously.

"They'll never fight us when we got guns," he said. "Might shoot poison arrows at us behind our backs."

He had had some experience with the Indians and knew their ways.

The two returned to the vicinity of the camp. They ate sparingly of their food, for it was getting low. Again in the early dawn they were awakened by the drilling. That noon they finished up the provisions Roberts had given them.

By night they were hungry. The first panic seized hold of Darvey.

"We got to get chow, Mac," he said.

"Yeh. But how?"

"Well, we know where the supply shack is. It's a good two hundred yards from the well, so we ought to be able to get in there and steal some grub."

They carried out this project successfully and returned laden with cans of food. They ate ravenously of cold beans and pork and canned meats, by the light of a small fire.

ROBERTS went on drilling. The rotary was turning, and the peon on the fourble board had attained some degree of proficiency under the hearty cursing of the driller.

"He's beat us," said McGrew.

"The hell he has!"

They gloated over the diamonds which Darvey had kept fastened in his pocket through all their trials.

The two had found a spring to the north, and this they visited at noon. After returning to their shelter, they lay down for a siesta. Darvey was awakened by the crackling of the bush. He peeked out through the openings in the leaf wall of their shack.

Standing within six feet of him, staring at the house of leaves, was the girl Conchita. Her big eyes were wide open, her red lips parted. In one hand she held a small pail, half filled with berries. Darvey pushed McGrew with his hand and put his fingers over the blacksmith's mouth to keep him from speaking. The girl turned away indecisively.

The derrick man saw her eyes drop to the ground. The sunlight pierced the trees in spots and, as the girl stooped to pick up something, Darvey's heart failed him. McGrew, fully awakened, watched Conchita.

Something sparkled in Conchita's hand. They heard her exclaim in pleasure at the thing she held. Darvey and McGrew at the same moment realized what she had found. She had stumbled on one of the shining gems, one that they had missed in their search, but which they had probably half uncovered.

Then Conchita's eyes went to the shelter of brush again. She came a little nearer, not yet sure of herself. She did not know that any one was within, and it was evidently her intention to peek through the branches.

"Get her," whispered Darvey to his powerful comrade.

McGrew, squatting behind the walls of branches, crept silently toward the opening on his hands and knees. The girl, hearing the movement, started back with a little cry of fright. Then she turned and, just as McGrew sprang out at her, she began to run toward the oil camp.

But the mighty McGrew reached her, and snapped her neck back, with the idea of stopping her mouth. He tripped, and his whole weight was thrown on her frail head. With a short faint cry she sank to the ground, her head limp, her body lifeless. The pail of berries was bent beneath her.

McGrew rose and looked down at her. Darvey ran to her side. She was dead. McGrew, stronger than he knew, had broken her neck.

"My God, Mac, we're done for now," gasped Darvey.

McGrew was frightened and sorry. He cursed unhappily.

"I never meant to kill her," he growled.

"Boy, but you have, and killed her good. We'll have to work fast now, McGrew. If they find us and the body here, we'll be wanted for murder. We never can go back to civilization."

"Let's bury her," said McGrew.

This they did, working feverishly, digging a hole with sharpened sticks and their knives.

ALL THE rest of the day and most of the night they cowered in the jungle, having removed their food from the shack and torn it down, obliterating as far as possible all traces of their occupancy. They heard cries and calls for Conchita in the peons' and Roberts' voices; men tramped about through the bush, looking for the girl.

But at dawn the clanging of the tools came to them again. Roberts was still drilling.

The two were now panic stricken. Murder had been done and they were killers. Darvey's eyes, with deep black circles beneath them, burned in his head. He was racking his brains for a way out. McGrew, worried also, yet trusted that his partner would get them out of this dangerous situation.

At last, the derrick man solved the problem.

"I've got it," he said at dawn, snapping his fingers.

The dozing McGrew at once sat up.

"What?"

"Those Indians. We'll sick them on the camp."

"Th' hell you say. I think we oughta beat it quick fer Maracaibo. They'll never prove we killed Conchita. Maybe they'll think th' Indians done it."

Darvey shook his head stubbornly.

"We're going to go through with it."

McGrew shrugged.

"C'mon, then. I'm with you."

THEY reached the Indian camp before noon. There were several men there—tall, straight, brown skinned fellows, who carried spears and bows with quivers of arrows. The arrival of the two white men threw the whole camp into consternation. The women ran for the bush, and the men prepared for defense. But Darvey and McGrew made the sign of peace. Presently the chief of the Indians came forward hesitantly.

Darvey knew some Spanish. He addressed the chief in this language. The chief did not understand, but another man stepped forward. The derrick man at last made himself understood. He told of the camp near the river. The Indian said they already knew of this.

"These men will flood the jungle with oil," explained Darvey, speaking slowly and repeating each word till he saw the light of comprehension in the interpreter's eyes. "They will kill all the animals. It is your land they are taking."

The interpreter shrugged. He conferred with the chief.

"We know that," was the reply.

"Attack them, then," said Darvey. "Kill them all!"

But the chief, on being told what was said, shook his head vigorously.

"It is too dangerous. They are strong, many men there," said the interpreter.

Darvey made a gesture of contempt.

"You can do it easily. We'll help you."

He indicated the pistols that McGrew and he carried.

It was not until they had parleyed for two hours that the chief finally approved of their plan. Darvey and McGrew were to have charge of the raid. They would give the signal for the attack. The Indians were to be unrestrained in their plunder.

The two renegades remained with their new friends till the next morning. Then, accompanied by thirty fighters, all armed with spears and bows and arrows, they marched toward Roberts' encampment.

About noon they arrived on the outskirts of the clearing. A heavy roar came to them, a noise which frightened the Indians. But Darvey told them it was the well.

Roberts had struck oil.

The black petroleum was shooting over the top of the derrick and, at a safe distance, watching with pride, stood the tall driller and his peons. They were covered with grime and oil, but they had conquered.

When the well should have blown itself clean of dirt and water, Roberts would rush in and shut the big valves. The spouting fountain of oil would slowly diminish, until finally it would cease. Then the driller's work would be done. He could pack up and return to Maracaibo, ready for the next job. He had conquered, in spite of betrayal, in spite of his murdered sweetheart, with all the odds of the grim jungle against him.

THIS drove Darvey into a fury—to see the tall driller triumphant; he cursed feverishly. The jungle had thrown him off balance and the finding of the diamonds had finished the job.

"Come on," he ordered, signaling the Indians.

The peons were grouped near their master. Off guard, at this great moment, which had never ceased to lose its thrill for him, Roberts watched his gusher shoot itself into the sky, pride in his eyes.

The Indians, in a circle, were halfway across the clearing before one of the peons saw them. The man let out a screech of

terror that sounded above the roaring of the well.

Roberts turned and, drawing a revolver, began to fire. The peons, grasping their *machetes*, stood ready to fight.

The Indians threw their long spears, and several men in the group went down. Roberts yelled at them to scatter and seek shelter; but the suddenness of the attack and the impression of being surrounded threw the peons into panic. They milled about, a free target for the Indians.

The well, by this time clean, could not be shut in. It shot its fluid up in a mighty stream, gas shooting the oil out in great spurts. The petroleum began running in streams along the earth, filling the clearing.

For perhaps twenty minutes the slaughter went on. Roberts seemed to have a charmed life. He had taken shelter behind the blacksmith's shack and was firing at the Indians.

McGrew and Darvey, holding back, fired their revolvers from the shelter of the bush.

The great well spouted, undisturbed. The rain of oil fell heavily.

The Indians had murdered many peons; whenever one detached himself from the main group he was at once slaughtered. Suddenly McGrew and Darvey, aghast at the frightful havoc they had set in motion and half brought to their senses by it, heard a long, horrible wail. It came from Roberts.

And then, the whole clearing seemed to burst into flames. The Indians, perhaps in their ignorance, perhaps by a chance spark struck by steel against a rock, had lighted the oil.

A mighty roaring, now of fire, seized the whole atmosphere. The black smoke billowed up, as the fire streaked across the clearing and found the source of the oil. The well, with a muffled booming, took fire and blazed into the sky. The wooden derrick burned brightly in the smoke.

The whole scene was darkened. Enveloped in flames, Indians and peons alike, rushed madly to escape the tongues of fire.

McGrew and Darvey stood frozen, their hearts stopped within them, their eyes staring and their ears stunned by the frightful wails of burning men, men being cooked alive. They were forced to step back, out of self preservation, a few minutes later. Tottering, seized with revulsion at what they had done, their senses came back to them.

But it was too late. The burning oil was spreading, spreading to the jungle. Already trees were beginning to catch. The smoke was now too heavy to see, and besides, they were sickened at the sight of the burning grave. They rushed to the river, in panic, terror of hell in their hearts.

They reached the boats and threw one adrift. McGrew seized the oars and they rowed silently to the other side of the stream. The camp was already burning.

Darvey threw himself to the ground and groveled in the dirt. McGrew, head bent, sat beside him, looking across the river at the fire.

Then, out of the billowing smoke, came two or three burning men, Indians and peons alike rushing for the river. But their terrible screams were death cries; they lived only to fall face downward in the water.

DARVEY rocked to and fro. McGrew watched with wide opened eyes. Presently the derrick man recovered his senses. He sat up.

"McGrew, we've won," he said, his throat dry. "We've beat him. We can buy the concession for a song now. The diamonds are ours."

"Yeh," said McGrew. "They're ours. We've beat him."

They forced themselves to gloat, for it was the only thing which could keep them from madness. To put their frightful deeds behind them was the only way to preserve themselves.

"Damn Roberts, anyways! He was a dog!" said McGrew in bravado. "Serves him right. An' who cares for a few Injuns and peons?"

"You're right," said Darvey.

He stood up. McGrew rose beside him.

"We're millionaires now, Mac," said Darvey, trying to inject happiness into his voice.

"Yeh. We kin have all the Conchitas we want, an' to hell with Roberts and his kind! I'm glad we killed that damn' girl, though."

Together they stared at the flames, which were still spreading. The smoke billowed forth, but little carried across the stream now, for the breeze blew in the other direction.

"It's good we killed that girl," said Darvey, repeating McGrew's words. "'Twouldn't have been nice to think she was bein' roasted, would it?"

So engrossed were the two with the fire and with the thoughts of the diamonds, theirs most certainly now, that they heard nothing.

The bush parted quietly behind them. A frightful figure stood there, listening to their words. For a moment the figure stood motionless. It was John, the peon. His big mustache, his shaggy gray hair, were singed to nothing; his clothing was scorched and his skin red with burns. In his right hand he held a *machete* and on its blade was dried blood.

Suddenly he raised the long knife and, with a terrible swing, struck McGrew in the neck. The swipe of the knife, wielded with terrific force, cleaved downward into the big man's neck and struck his collar bone. Darvey, with a scream of terror, turned just in time to receive the second blow of the *machete*, wielded by the crazed peon. It hit him in the face, cutting a long gash which reddened instantly, and he fell to his knees, blubbering and crying in pain; the peon raised the knife again and slashed at him furiously.

Presently Darvey lay still, and John the peon, eyes wide and filled with madness, stared down at the two bodies.

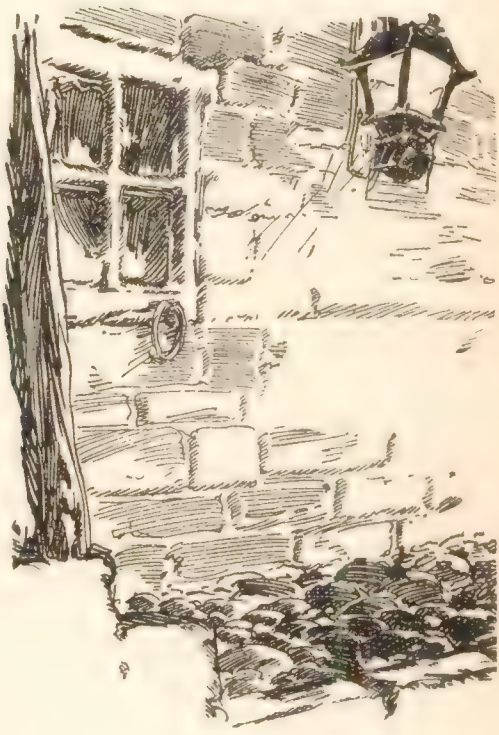
"Murderers of my daughter," he muttered in his bastard Spanish. "I have avenged her."

He stooped and searched the pockets of the two. He found stones in Darvey's pocket, and his eyes lighted in cupidity when he saw them sparkle in the light. *Machete* in hand, he tied the bag of stones beneath the remnants of his shirt, spat twice at the men who had killed Conchita —his only child—and then disappeared in the bush.

A Novelette of the Days when Apache

TERROR LAND

By HUGH PENDEXTER



CHAPTER I

THE CASTAWAYS

FOR DAYS the Apache smokes had climbed into the perfect Arizona sky on all sides of the collection of mud boxes called Tucson. On mesa and peak hidden watchers talked beneath somber pencilings across the blue heavens. Like so many gray black noxious weeds the smoke rose from ten thousand foot levels in the far background, from various heights within a few miles of the town.

From day to day Tucson men watched the smoke tendrils shrewdly, speculatively, and found them so many smudgy fingers writing terrible invitations and fearful urgings. They decided it would be unsafe to wander any distance from the adobe huts, and then they turned back to the monte tables, the mescal shops, or took their siestas and otherwise carried on the circumscribed lives of castaways.

The young American, known as Yuba, finished his breakfast and wandered to the ruined plaza to read the signs anew before making wagers for, or against, the arrival of the Butterfield Mail Company's eastbound stagecoach. He found the smokes very thick. From the purple peaks of the Pinaleno, from the Sierra Mogollon towering over the Tonto Basin, from the pine covered Santa Catalina range, the young man saw the smokes crawling upward. And he was quick to pick out new smokes against the southern horizon, down Tubac way, where already the road was lined with graves of recent victims.

There was no question that the Apaches were out in many small bands, killing and burning, with their warfare extending as

Smoke Still Menaced the Southwest Towns

far as Durango, even to Zacatecas; for their range included New Mexico, and half of Texas, and the Mexican states of Sonora and Chihuahua—an area greater than that of France and Germany.

The smokes in the south satisfied him that Mangas Colorado and his Mimbrenos were returning in scattered bands from a Sonora raid.

"How's she look, Yuba?" growled a deep voice behind the young man.

Yuba turned to gaze, with poorly concealed disfavor, upon the shaggy monster of a man. While the great majority of the several hundred men in Tucson were fugitives from Texas justice, or from California vigilance committees, or were ruffians fled from Sonora and Chihuahua, there were degrees in the civic degradation; and Rin Scoke occupied a niche all his own. He was a scalp hunter, which was well enough, as long as the governors of Sonora and Chihuahua were said to be paying him as high as three hundred dollars per trophy.

He was held in disrepute, however, even by hardened wretches, because of the conviction that he had stepped out of his legitimate field to sell the hair of Pima Indians, who were kindly disposed to the whites and who constituted about the only force in the territory capable and willing to give battle to the Apaches.

Yet business was business with young Yuba, who briefly replied:

"Fifty dollars that the coach from Frisco doesn't come in within three hours of schedule. Fifty to a hundred and fifty the coach doesn't pull in at all."

While Scoke was hesitating a long-haired gambler came up behind him and called out—

"I take both bets, Yuba."

Scoke wheeled and growled—

"Rames, them was bets for me to take."

"They're taken. You seemed to lack nerve," listlessly replied Rames.

A STRAGGLING procession from the narrow, crooked thoroughfares serving as streets now came toward the plaza. The majority halted before the mescal shop where the coach would stop. It was a motley collection of human wreckage. In all the history of Western development there was never the equal of these isolated men for lawlessness, debauchery and lust to kill for the sake of killing.

Other men made bets for and against the stagecoach's getting through. Rames varied the monotony by offering—

"A hundred even that old Montezuma won't return inside of thirty days."

"I'll take it," said Yuba. "A hundred to two hundred that Nunez don't return inside of three days."

"Make it even money," urged Rames.

Yuba rested his hands on his hips and cogitated. He made a colorful picture, in his short Mexican jacket, gay with silver buttons and gold thread, his crimson sash hiding the leather belt, his sombrero and its band of gold coins. He finally decided:

"No. Not even money. Even on almost any one else. But not on Nunez the hated. He has the devil's luck in getting through."

"A bad play to bet Nunez won't get through," commented the proprietor of the mescal shop. "And he don't like to be called what you said—the hated."

"He's touchy about that name," added Scoke.

"What's his name to me? I didn't name him?" jeered Yuba.

"I'll bet even money he comes back. The end of my pile," challenged Rames.

A Mexican woman with her head and face, with the exception of her left eye, covered by her *rebozo*, passed close to Yuba and murmured—

"Do not bet against the luck of Nunez, señor."

Yuba did not glance at her, but plucked at his chin and frowned and then told the gathering:

"Betting won't stop a man from getting through, nor save him from being rubbed out. The bet stands at the odds asked, if any one wants to take it now."

Rames' lips twisted in a sardonic grin as he said:

"I have a notion it will bring me bad luck at the tables to bet in any way on Nunez. But I'll give you a hundred even the coach won't be more than an hour late; or that the war's started in the East; or that the war's been prevented by Abe Lincoln knuckling under; or that the first news to come is that Sumter has been fired on, or hasn't."

"Being Louisiana born, I'm for the South. Yet I'll bet Lincoln hasn't knuckled under. I'll bet the first news we get is that the war hasn't started."

Others now felt stimulated to lay wagers. The betting was becoming fast and furious when a theatrically attired Sonoran ruffian from the top of a mud house called out in Spanish that he saw dust far up the stage road. Yuba softly told the gambler—

"Damn you, Rames, you posted the greaser up there to signal when he saw a dust."

"If you're going to gamble you should know your business," tersely said Rames.

SOON the dust, golden yellow, rose above the mesquite and greasewood and was perceptible to all. Thousands of feet above it and staining the wondrous heavens climbed the terrible Apache slogan—Kill! kill! kill!

"Here they come, inside the hour," cried Rin Scoke, grinning maliciously at Yuba.

The latter paid his coach bets. The crowd moved forward to learn the latest news from the East, via California. The Sonorans galloped madly up the road to ride back with the swaying dusty vehicle. Dogs came to life and chased pigs from the foul wallows.

Big Bill was driving with the armed

guard beside him. The spectators roared approval as Bill leaned out and cracked his long whip at a drunken horseman who was riding close to the coach and peering through a window.

"Must be dainty baggage," remarked Rames, his black eyes sparkling.

The team came to a standstill. A man in buckskin yelled—

"Has war busted loose?"

"Has old Abe skedaddled?" cried a lanky Texan.

"No, to the two of you," bellowed the driver, "an' damn your hides, old Abe ain't the kind to skedaddle!"

The crowd roared good naturedly, although more than ninety per cent. Southern in its sympathies.

"Has Fort Sumter—" began Yuba, then stopped and gaped at the wonderfully attractive picture of youth and joyous anticipation framed in the open window.

The clamor of the crowd also ceased. The young woman swiftly swept her gaze over their gaping faces and shifted to take in the background of mud hovels, the broken pottery, broken corrals, the bake ovens, the heaps of refuse and garbage and a dead mule. The joy faded from her small oval face and she stared with loathing at the dingy cell of life, parched, naked and fetid, that men called Tucson.

The onlookers, staring and leering, caught her profile as she turned her head to tell an invisible companion:

"He isn't in sight. I can't see him."

The grinning and leering increased as spectators detected a note of fear in her voice.

As the driver was swinging to the ground and the guard began throwing off some mail, a Mexican, whose enormous hat, weighted down by a snake made of silver bullion, was as large as a cart wheel, glided forward. His big hat blocked all view of the pretty passenger. His small black eyes were staring insolently into her startled visage, and she was involuntarily exclaiming in alarm, when Yuba darted forward. He caught the fellow by the shoulder and hurled him violently backward.

The girl did not seem to be greatly relieved by the thin, clean shaven features of the young man. She found his dark eyes predatory. With a smile he swept off his hat and greeted—

"You are most welcome to Tucson, señorita."

His American voice relieved her considerably, although his soft laughter contained mockery. She disapproved of the gay Mexican jacket and the sash and the three curious cords around his neck. His attire suggested effeminacy to her. She also disapproved of the hands, as slender as a woman's, resting lightly on the window sill.

Then he and everything else in the unlovely picture became of no account. She told him—

"Will you be so good as to get word to my father, Professor Potts Maury, that Miss Philena Maury, his daughter, is anxious for him to join her at once?"

Yuba's smile slowly vanished, although his eyes held glints of humor. He said—

"You must mean you're Montezuma Maury's girl."

"I am Professor Potts Maury's daughter," she stiffly corrected.

"Probably the same man, but Montezuma to us, miss, because of his zeal in hunting for the genuine Montezuma's treasures."

THE ONLY other passenger now leaned forward, a plump, comely matron, and took over the situation. She said—

"Young man, suppose you cease posing and stir your boots, and get word to the young lady's father *now!*"

He bowed low, with a touch of color in his dark cheeks. With diabolical amusement in his gaze, he politely replied:

"I would love, above all else, to be of that service to my fair compatriot, señora, or señorita. But the errand will require much more time than Driver Bill will be willing to wait. It's like this, fair ladies: Montezuma—Professor Potts Maury—

has not returned from his treasure hunting in Sonora. And the Apaches are very thick between here and the border."

The girl exclaimed in horror. She felt as if the earth were being snatched from beneath her. Then she was piteously crying:

"Not here to meet me? But he was to be here. I tell you he wrote for me to come on this stage, that he would join me here. We were to travel back to Tennessee together. You're mistaken."

Rin Scoke guffawed and told the grinning men—

"Wouldn't Nunez like this?"

"He may yet," called back the mescal trader.

Yuba's eyes narrowed. He frowned slightly and impatiently insisted:

"Your father certainly struck out for the Sonora Border a month ago. All he's talking about since coming to Tucson was the treasure hidden by the Aztecs. That's why the boys called him Montezuma. Of course, he planned to be back in time to meet you; but something missed fire. Perhaps he found the treasure and is waiting to dodge the Mexicans and get it out of the country. More likely he found nothing of treasure, but has found his road is blocked by the Apaches. All you can do, miss, is to go and leave your father to follow on the next stage."

She emerged from her bewilderment, from the shock of her great disappointment. She opened the door and stepped out. The head of chestnut hair and its chip bonnet was held high. Her blue eyes were blazing as she ordered the driver—

"Hand down my boxes, if you please."

To her astounded traveling companion she said—

"Will you please hand out my carpetbag?"

Then she leveled her gaze on the young man and announced:

"The Maurys never quit each other. What is your name, please?" It was a command, rather than a request.

Hat in hand, he bowed low and replied:

"I'm called Yuba, Miss Maury. I was named after the Yuba River diggings in California. Of course, you can't stop here. It's even worse than it looks. We're all runaways from California, Texas, New Mexico and old Mexico. Your father will overtake you, probably on the next stage. Driver Bill will tell you a decent place to stop off and wait for him."

The driver impatiently broke in:

"It's all out of question, miss. Your pap ain't no baby. Git back in this coach and act sensible, like he'd want you to do."

THE MATRON in the coach, now recovered from her amazement, shrilly expostulated:

"Are you stark raving crazy, my dear? You might as well go out and ask the Apaches to take you in." And her head appeared at the window to glare wrathfully at the grinning faces.

"You are not wide of the mark," murmured Yuba. "The Apaches steal very close at night. They may steal closer. Mangas Colorado is returning from a raid into Mexico. I bet fifty he would pick up your outfit."

"And you're doubtless sorry you lost your wager, you miserable young wretch!"

The spectators roundly cheered this speech. Rames, in a flat colorless voice, began singing—

"Oh, buffalo girls, won't you go home with me?"

Yuba smiled into the angry, flushed face and said:—

"I'll gladly give fifty any time to see your beautiful self, fair lady."

"Impudent brat!" she retorted.

"Hop in, miss," commanded the driver. "I'm sort of keen to make the San Pedro crossing. Every mile I can make afore sundown is worth two miles tomorrer."

Miss Maury reached inside the coach and drew out a gaily embroidered carpetbag. Then she was half inside the door, her arms around her companion as she kissed her farewell. Drawing back and shaking off the detaining hands she reminded:

"We Maurys are very clannish. We always stick by each other."

"But your father isn't here to stick to," wailed the matron.

Yuba gingerly touched the girl's shoulder and warned her:

"You're sure to detest this place and the people. You'll wish yourself back in the coach before it's out of sight."

"My boxes, driver," ordered the girl.

"I tell you, you'll detest it!" fiercely repeated Yuba.

"I already detest it," she coolly told him.

"Last chance, miss," warned the worried driver.

Winking back tears she shook her head and thrust out her round chin and gestured for her baggage. Two boxes of rawhide were deposited on the ground. The driver gathered up the reins and looked at her in hope she would change her mind. Her eyes were blurred and she did not see him. The long whip cracked like a rifle report, and the wheels threw up the grit. A plump hand and arm came through the window to wave farewell; and the swaying stagecoach was off to run the eastern gate of Apache land.

The girl watched after the coach without seeing it until a trembling hand had brushed away the tears. By that time it was a cloud of dust, with the leaders ever striving to emerge from the heart of it. She drew a deep breath and turned to find herself the focal point of all eyes, the center of interest for as conscienceless a group of cutthroats as ever infested any lawless spot in North America. As lecherous eyes met and overwhelmed her shifting gaze she was vaguely remembering that Arizona was a Territory in name only, and that, owing to the probability of a civil war, it had no form of government. Yuba could have assured her it was a cesspool of ruffianism, that these leering creatures were as murderous as any Apaches, and unlike the latter would have no mercy for one of their own race.

Yuba broke the ominous silence by murmuring over her shoulder:

"Now you've done it! You must retire at once."

"Yes, yes. The hotel? Where is it?"

"There is no *fonda*—place for accommodating strangers—in Tucson," he explained.

"But the room my father had?"

"Occupied by a scalp hunter. A poor place, or I'd drive him out. You're in *borrasca* if ever a young woman was. But I'll get you a room."

YUBA called out in Spanish to a Mexican woman who had not yet passed from vivacity and color to withered dotage. The woman, her hands on her swaying hips, swung off insolently. Yuba cast a side glance at the distracted girl and was satisfied that she understood nothing he had said. A man in the leering crowd bawled:

"Pretty smart work—if it works. But no favorites, Yuba."

"And there's Nunez," reminded Scoke of the gruesome trade.

Ignoring them, Yuba told Miss Maury:

"Happened to think of a room that will answer. The woman, Marie, goes to make it more presentable."

As he would have conducted her after the Mexican woman, now disappearing in an alley, the spectators surged forward to block the way. A desperado, who had outraced a Texas posse, was the first to establish contact. He thrust forward a begrimed paw and seized the girl's hand and boisterously cried:

"You're mighty welcome, pretty bird. Don't worry 'bout no room in Tucson. Lots of rooms for you."

Venomous as a rattlesnake, Yuba slashed at the man's wrist with a knife, and an instant later brought down the heavy barrel of a .45 on the shaggy head and stretched the intruder on his back, unconscious. Still holding the gun half raised, he apostrophized the silent figure:

"Damn you! That'll be a plenty from you." To the dazed girl he ordered, "Walk ahead of me up that alley where the woman went."

He picked up the carpetbag with his

free hand and forgot his rage in grinning at the gay pattern. As the girl slowly advanced, staring straight ahead, he gave an order to a Mexican in a filthy cotton blanket. At the entrance of the alley he turned and warned the slowly advancing group:

"Keep clear of this alley when I begin pistol practise. I'd hate to hurt a friend."

The men halted. Walking beside the girl, he startled her by whistling shrilly when halfway up the alley. Two little naked boys with coarse black hair hanging over their small, beady eyes, suddenly appeared from behind a mound of garbage. Each carried a tiny bow and three arrows. The girl exclaimed under her breath and drew back. Yuba chuckled and explained:

"Apache kids. Prisoners. They'd be glad to shoot you if I gave the word."

He laughed silently as he saw sudden fear dilating the blue eyes.

"They are terrible," she whispered; then, more firmly, "They do not interest me."

"They interest Rin Scoke, our scalp hunter, several hundred dollars' worth. He killed their folks and sold the hair in Sonora. Says he got three hundred a scalp. He was about to wipe out these kids when some of the boys happened along. They're scarcely more than babies, yet they have to earn their dinner. Watch how they do it."

He snapped his fingers and pointed to two bottles, buried to the neck in the side of the adobe shelter, which made a cul-de-sac of the alley.

The terrible midgets at once raised their bows, and with scarcely any hesitation each released an arrow. And each arrow entered the neck of a bottle. Yuba grinned and tossed a silver coin on the ground and nodded. Possessed of the coin, the two scurried away. Yuba told the girl:

"That's how they pay for their dinners each day. Have to shoot an arrow into a bottle before they can eat. They don't dare to run from town for fear the scalp hunter would overtake them before they could make an Apache rancheria— And here comes the man with your boxes."

"Please don't show me any more sights," she begged. "Take me where I can be *alone*."

WITHOUT a word he took the boxes from the man and led the way to the one room adobe house at the end of the alley. She entered behind him and walked on new Navaho blankets spread over the dirt floor. The dried mud walls were unadorned. The dingy ceiling was covered with canvas, tacked and glued at the edges and sagging in the center. He noticed her upward, puzzled glance and lightly explained:

"Not an ornament, miss. Just an idea of mine to keep the centipedes from falling on one."

"God in heaven!" she whispered. "What more?"

"I'm afraid God has forgotten Tucson," he curtly told her. "You would light and stay here against all I and your friends could say. You were fine and independent when you told Tucson how the Maurys always stuck together. Be sport enough to back your play, now you've made it, even if you don't like the game. Don't whine."

She felt the rebuke like a blow in the face. She fiercely told him—

"The Maurys don't whine."

He laughed with an explosive note. Then he was saying:

"That's right. Get mad. It's the only way you can hold on here. And keep mad. Some of us are crazy in earnest. Your father must have been crazy to fetch you to this hell hole."

"But he never dreamed he would not be able to meet me, that it would be necessary for me to stop here and wait for him," she heavily defended. Then with a sigh she collapsed on a rude couch, covered with new blankets, and rested her elbows on her knees and buried her face in her hands.

He stared down more curiously than pityingly. He advised—

"Take your siesta and then we will eat."

Lifting her head she coldly told him:

"Don't wait to eat with me. I prefer eating alone."

"All right. Have it your way. Only you must eat here and stay in this room, unless you have a man who can keep the crowd back. I'll have the woman bring you some chicken."

"No! I want nothing. Only to be alone."

"You little fool! You plan to starve yourself to death so your father will find you dead when he comes. You eat the chicken."

"She may bring it. I will try and eat some. All I wish is to be alone."

"Neighborly," he murmured. "Oh, you're very welcome. We love to show strangers our beautiful city."

He was mocking her, and yet he had provided her with the only privacy in Tucson. She would have liked to acknowledge that much, but could not bring herself to speak. He backed to the door and warned—

"Keep the bar down."

He closed the door after him, and she sprang across the room and slammed the bar down with a crash. Then she threw herself on the couch and clapped her hands over her mouth to suppress a hysterical scream.

CHAPTER II

THE COVETOUS

THE SUN was down with a good night fling of glory at the Sierra Santa Catalina, and the west was banked with crimson and purple and golden clouds, when Yuba stood outside the door and waited for his brisk rapping to be answered. Her voice came in an unsteady undertone, demanding—

"Who's there?"

"The one called Yuba," he lightly replied.

There was a minute of waiting; then the bar was raised and she stood wedged between the door and the casing. The masses of chestnut hair were neatly arranged, but the blue eyes failed to reinforce this gesture of femininity. They stared hopelessly, almost blankly, into Yuba's thin face. He believed he read terror in her gaze and with a grimace he impatiently told her:—

"Well, I haven't bitten you yet."

"What do you want?"

"To know why you didn't eat the chicken with *frijole* fixings the Mexican woman fetched you."

"I could eat nothing."

She slowly began drawing back so she might close the door. He advanced a foot, blocked the move and told her:

"You must eat. You must come with me and eat. You can't stay cooped up in this hole. You must show yourself. You must get used to meeting folks, even Tucson folks."

"But such folks!" she whispered, her eyes widening, and she was again seeing the uncouth, desperate creatures gathered to meet the stagecoach.

"Sorry," he crisply told her, "but we have no other folks. And you didn't have to stop here."

"Oh, I know! I know! Don't talk about that. I'll go with you; but I don't feel I can eat."

She turned back and caught up a light, flimsy shawl and threw it over her head and came forth. He whistled between his fingers and the Mexican woman came up the alley. He spoke to her briefly and then explained to Miss Maury:

"Marie will stand guard. If you leave anything loose in Tucson, you'll never see it again. At least, you'll never get it back."

Her manner was hostile, or fearful. She would have walked behind him had he not curtly insisted:

"None of that. I haven't eyes in the back of my head. And in Tucson a woman walks ahead of her man."

"Her man!" she cried.

"Her escort," he mumbled. "Walk along ahead of me and don't fight over words."

"Is every one here a ruffian?" she asked over her shoulder.

"About that many."

"Including yourself?"

He frankly confessed:

"I'm no saint. I was run out of the Yuba River diggings by a vigilance committee for being a gambler. Rather I was chased out. I killed two horses in making the Colorado crossing at Fort Yuma. I came here to find a sanctuary. To stay here I've had to throw in with worse than I knew in California."

"You're educated."

"I know it. And I've misused my opportunities. And I dislike sermons. I warned you you'd detest us. Turn to the right."

He reached forward and caught her arm and saved her from walking into a hole. He warned:

"Watch where you step. Drinking water has to be hauled in. When the Apaches are too close we dig wells. Get good enough water for a short time, then the alkali seeps in and spoils it. Timber's too expensive to cover the holes. Lots of them. Dangerous at night."

SHE HESITATED at the mouth of a street, lighted from both sides by mescal shops and gaming places. A babel of English and Spanish, stressed by much profanity, filled the narrow, straggling way. The girl turned and stared at Yuba. She was soul sick. She believed she would collapse. Tucson was not only a hell, but a malodorous, nauseating hell.

She felt the young man's hand on her shoulder, gently pushing her forward. Under his silent directions she passed open mud sheds, where bleary eyed, lounging creatures stood in the street to drink fiery mescal from the long bars. These turned leering eyes upon her and spoke in foul asides. She stumbled against a crouching woman, telling her beads to ward off evil. She hurried by long rooms given over to monte.

"Keep your head up," Yuba cautioned.

She obeyed and went on, a hand swinging her skirts to escape contamination as she passed heaps of refuse. At last Yuba called a halt before an eating room. He kept close behind her as they entered. The street side was torn out, leaving three walls and a low black ceiling. Yuba directed her to proceed to a table in a corner, where he could sit with his back to a wall.

As she picked her way between tables, her eyes staring straight ahead to avoid the covetous gaze of the diners, she noticed that men directly in her path quickly got out of the way. She wondered whether they were becoming polite. The impelling influence, however, was not respect for young womanhood, but for Yuba's significant manner of walking, like a dancing girl, with his hands on his slim hips. And the onlookers knew each hand was close to a gun.

He seated the girl on his left with her back to the wall, while he took a similar precaution against any approach from behind. She would have preferred sitting opposite to him, so she would see nothing of the rough and reckless humanity at the other tables. But Yuba, with the one gun drawn and resting in his lap, could not risk having his range of vision blocked. He ordered fried chicken, bread made from mesquite beans, some black figs and coffee. He suddenly feared that she did not have enough from which to select, and he sent for chocolate, *frijoles*, *chile con carne*, *enchiladas* and other dishes, all hot and savory, until she begged him to cease.

ALTHOUGH she did not notice it, he doubtless was the only male in the room who did not have a drink before him. But she did observe his quick, nervous way of eating. He was continually sweeping his gaze over the room and noting every man who entered. Between these darting glances he snatched mouthfuls of food. She found herself likening him to a wild animal, warily devouring his kill and ever on guard against an interruption.

This comparison became more concrete; he was a starved wolf. She was weak from fasting and was glad to eat. But she could not resist watching his

dark, brooding eyes ever busy with reconnoitering. So busy at times were his spying eyes that he could not spare a glance at his plate, but would fumble blindly for food.

When the meal was nearly finished he appeared to be more at his ease. He took notice of her and flashed his white teeth in a smile. Leaning forward she murmured—

"Whom have you been looking for?"

He half closed his eyes and softly replied:

"You're keen. Thought you were too scared."

"Then there is some one you dread to see entering this room?" she whispered, and her agitation swept back and engulfed her.

His mouth twisted viciously down at one corner. He arrogantly corrected—

"I don't dread meeting any man on earth—if I can see him first." And he laughed silently at his qualification.

"Who is the man you want to see first?" she prodded.

"You wouldn't understand. It's Nunez the hated."

"The hated! Is that part of his name?"

"A very significant part," he grimly assured her.

"Then he is feared if he's hated," she shrewdly reasoned.

He nodded, his eyes sparkling with approval:

"You're waking up. Your nerve is coming back."

She did not believe her courage was returning. She urged:

"If he comes he will make trouble for you. Let's go. Now!"

He shook his head slowly and replied:

"You can't escape trouble by running away from it, at least, not in Tucson. Nunez, of Spanish, American and Apache blood, is down in Mexico, or was. He's expected back."

"He doesn't like you?"

This time he laughed in genuine amusement.

"He doesn't like any one, miss. Oh, we always get along all right."

"Then why fear him tonight?" she persisted.

He veiled his eyes. It would help none to throw her into a panic by telling her that Nunez carried a high hand once he had decided to appropriate another man's woman.

"I don't fear him," he carelessly replied. "He's just a snake. I watch him just as I do any other snake. He used to ride with Ramon Castillo in the country around Los Angeles. Was one of his *servientes* and outgrew his master's authority and set up shop for himself. He isn't worth talking about. Talk about something else."

SHE FELT physically stronger for having eaten. Although she did not trust him she wanted to be companionable. She spoke of the three curious yellow, blue and white cords around his neck.

Instantly he was affable and engaging. He readily explained:

"Got them for doing a good turn for Mangas Colorado down below Tubac last fall. He was scooting up the valley, chased by some Sonora scum. I don't cotton to Injuns, especially the Apaches, but I held a stronger grudge against that particular outfit of Sonorans. Without knowing it was Red Sleeves I was helping, I chipped in with a little gunplay. The red devil got through. A few weeks afterward he sent me this doo-dad I'm wearing around my neck. Sent it by a Mexican prisoner. It's an Apache medicine cord. Big medicine for the Mexican prisoner, too. It saved him from being hung head down over a slow fire—"

"Oh! Oh!"

"Common piece of Injun fun down here. The Mexican is Marie's brother. That's why she is willing to look after you when I ask it. The cords, to be regular, should hang from the right shoulder over the left hip. I tried it that way and nearly got rubbed out by tangling up my hand when reaching for my gun. Lucky I was a two gun man."

She stared at him in fascinated horror.

and for the moment forgot her surroundings. With a little gasp she whispered—

"You—you killed a man?"

He displayed his white teeth in amusement and cryptically replied—

"I'm here with you tonight, ain't I?"

"How old are you?" This abruptly.

"Twenty-four."

"Only a year older than I," she exclaimed. "I thought you were older."

"I feel older," he soberly told her. "Folks dead since I was fifteen. Had to look after myself. Fond of books. Read a heap. Sort of educated myself. Got into trouble on the Yuba. And that's about all."

She started to ask more questions but was diverted by a new arrival.

"The big man. The one who sells scalps," she muttered.

But Yuba had noticed Scoke's entrance.

"He's no good. Won't play the game square. Won't even do his own killing, unless it's some poor devil of a tame Injun. Likes to rub them out. Sells their hair to the governors of Sonora and Chihuahua. Brags about it as a good joke. Hair of more peaceful Injuns nailed to church doors down there than of Apaches. We have some tame Apaches living a few miles from town. Used to keep close to us. Now they've drawn back. Afraid of Scoke since several of their number have turned up missing. He'd scalp the two kids you saw shooting at the bottles if he dared."

"Oh, please, no more!" faintly pleaded the girl.

He eyed her curiously and said:

"All right. But you're queer. You start a trail and then quit it. Now you're wondering why any human being will stick in this place. Most of us here are bottled up. But I can get out if I go it alone and can get in touch with Mangas Colorado. And I'm sticking here to help hold Arizona for the South, if there's a war."

"Such a desolate land!"

"No, really a marvelous land," he earnestly insisted. "Great mineral riches. Good for stock raising. Good for crops in many places. Of course, it hasn't any military value except to cut off California from the Southern route. It was Montezuma—your father—who gave the real reason for holding it. The effect on Europe. Over there they don't know it's an empty country. They only know it's a big country. Your father was crazy, to go away and not come back in time to meet you, but he's sharp on other things. If war comes, and Europe learns that the South, first shot out the gun, has taken over this country, they'll think we're some pumpkins. So I'm sticking along until we can hold some sort of a convention, declaring for the South."

Her face lost its strained expression for the moment and became almost animated.

"All the Maurys are for the South," she softly said.

"Good. Now here's my medicine talk. You mustn't keep cooped up, or you'll attract more attention than if you walked out each day. There's *baile*, a Mexican dance tomorrow night. I'll call for you."

"Oh, no! I couldn't. Just coming here is hard enough."

HIS FEATURES lost their pleasantry and he was frowning into her startled face. Then he repeated his old trick of darting a quick glance around the room. He stiffened, and his eyes narrowed to slits as a Mexican entered. The man was garishly dressed and wore much gold and silver as ornaments. He was a dandy. Yuba watched him glide to a wall table and bend low and speak to Rames, the gambler.

"I could not go to a public dance—" she was defending when he cut her short by saying—

"Under the circumstances, perhaps it would be better if you didn't just yet."

She had entered the room against her will and abhorred the company. Yet no insult had been offered her and she became objective as she gained something of composure. She had caught the trick of following Yuba's wandering gaze. She was quick to discover the *caballero* at the gambler's table. She asked:

"Who is that man? The one dressed so richly?"

"His gay clothes catch the eye, eh?" murmured Yuba without looking at the new arrival. Bending slightly forward he explained, "He's the reason why you needn't go to the *baile* tomorrow night. He's the right hand man of Nunez."

"The hated!" she supplied under her breath.

"The same. He is called Ventura. When he shows up, the master is not far away. It's best we go now."

He walked a few feet behind her, his hands on his hips, his bold eyes flinging challenges at each table. Swift side glances were darted at them from Rames' table, and the man Ventura whispered rapidly from the corner of his mouth. The two gained the street and, beyond murmuring the direction she should take, Yuba made no effort at conversation as he followed her through the noisome ways to the alley and to the hovel where the Mexican woman Marie was waiting. The latter came out on hearing steps. She asked a question. Yuba's reply was a dismissal; and she hastened away, eager to seize upon some of the night life.

"I wished the woman had stayed," said the girl.

"You've refused to have her. It's too late now," he replied. "They won't bother you until they've bothered me."

She passed inside and he advanced his foot as she made to close the door. In the poor light of the oil lamp her face suddenly became haggard. Accumulated fears made her frantic. Scarcely knowing what she did, she struck her small fist against his forehead. For a moment they stared into each other's eyes. His gaze was one of amazement; hers revealed the end of endurance and the beginning of hysteria.

He caught her wrist in a grip that hurt and thrust her into the room and followed and closed the door behind him. Still holding her by the wrist, he slowly slipped his free hand inside his short jacket. Her dilated eyes stared fixedly at the deliberate, sinuous movement of the slim brown hand as it disappeared. It was as slowly withdrawn and he was holding up for her inspection a .38 Colt revolver.

He suddenly tossed the weapon on the couch and released her and quietly said:

"It's a good gun. Easier for a lady to handle than a .45. It's loaded. But I can see that you and I will get along like a Pima and an Apache. I'm hunting up Marie and sending her back. She's very clever with a knife. Don't shoot her when she comes. Good night."

He stepped back over the threshold and closed the door. The bar slammed in place. He muttered:

"The little spitfire! Crazy in streaks."

He walked to the east side of the town and found Marie in a small dancehall and spoke to her briefly. For what he had done for her brother, although accomplished unwittingly, she left the gathering and went to keep the Maury girl company.

WITH the girl off his mind for the time being Yuba hurried to the largest gambling place and settled down to buck a faro game run by a Texan. He played the jack to lose and the ace and queen open. Luck was with him and the Texan remarked—

"You win at cards and with women, Yuba."

"Only half right, Texas. Had a notion that combination would win. Now it's time to change."

He shifted to other combinations and won consistently. The proprietor grumbled:

"Wish you'd take your paying streak to the monte layout. I want common, every day playing at my table."

"It's time I quit. I feel my luck thinning out. Cash!"

He pushed forward his chips and rose to lean negligently against the wall, his thumbs hooked in his sash, his gaze watching several men slowly advancing toward the table. He pocketed his winnings without looking at them. Rin Scoke was in the lead, held there by the pressure from behind. Then came Genna,

fat and deadly. The third man was Rames, pale of face and with eyes as coldly malignant as a crocodile's. It was the fourth man who held Yuba's scrutiny—Ventura, the trusted lieutenant of Nunez. Swarthy even for one of his race, he carried himself with insolence, which was endured by all he brushed against because of the master he represented.

Scoke tried to hold back when close to the table. Genna urged him forward.

"That's quite near enough, Genna," sharply warned Yuba as he slipped his fingers inside the sash covering his belt.

"No trouble, Yuba. Just want to have a friendly talk," boomed Genna's deep voice.

"You've made your smoke. Go ahead."

"We come to prevent trouble, not to hunt for it," added Rames' flat voice.

"I'm listening. What trouble you folks trying to prevent?" lazily asked Yuba.

Scoke's forehead was wet with nervous sweat. He hurriedly explained:

"It's like this, Yuba. It's about that new woman. We want to know just how the game stands."

"She has a mighty poor opinion of all of us," slowly replied Yuba.

"That's because she doesn't really know us," said Rames.

"She won't be here long enough to get acquainted," said Yuba. "Just waiting for her father to return."

"Her father will not be back very soon, Señor Yuba," spoke up Ventura.

"Ventura says he must be dead by Apaches, or Mexicans, by this time," explained Genna. "But dead or alive we feel we have a right to get acquainted with her. She needs friends. She can't stay cooped up in that 'dobe shed."

Scoke, with his gaze glued on the slim hands half concealed under the crimson sash, hurriedly insisted—

"Last thing we want, Yuba, is any quarreling over a woman."

"I don't think there'll be much quarreling. Probably some killing," said Yuba.

"Now just what do you mean by that, Señor Yuba?" softly asked Ventura.

"I mean I'll kill the man who makes a play at bothering her," explained Yuba, his dark eyes staring into the Mexican's face.

With elaborate care Scoke raised his empty hands and clasped them behind his neck.

"When a man says that, he can mean only one thing," broke in Rames' colorless voice.

"Yes, Yuba, you speak like she was your woman. If that's the case, say it," grumbled Genna.

Yuba eyed them thoughtfully for a few seconds. They were thieves and murderers. He could scarcely hope to survive their joint attack. But he knew the law of the cruel pack. He told the four:

"Yes, she's my woman. Didn't I give her my room?"

THE TALL Texan, impatient for play to be resumed, now spoke up, saying:

"That settles it! There can't be any general row here. If any one wants that gal he knows who to see about it, and only one man at a time will do any seeing. And if any kind of a fight is started at this table, I'll take it to be onneighborly." As he gave warning, he kicked up his booted foot and from the leg plucked forth a murderous bowie knife.

"Of course," gently agreed Ventura. "Señor Yuba is the man to see."

"And I'm always easy to find," said Yuba.

Scoke squirmed a passage from the table. Genna, a deadly colossus, paused to stare malevolently at the slim figure leaning against the discolored wall, while he shrewdly estimated the infinitesimal bit of time required for the half concealed hands to fish out two guns. The odds were too great. Some one, perhaps two of the four would survive, but Scoke's retreat had placed him the first man to catch lead. He nodded his big head slowly and in a hoarse bellowing voice intended to be a cheerful tone said:

"No hurry. Any talk to be made can be made later. Too many women, for

me to fight over one." He turned and ploughed a rough path through the expectant onlookers, and Rames was quick to fall in behind him, leaving Ventura to bring up the rear.

The Texan softly warned:

"Son, they're up to some game. They sure be up to some game."

Yuba nodded gloomily and admitted:

"Of course; and no one man can buck against that crowd unless he catches them one at a time. Too cramped up here for any fine work."

"Ain't that the true word? That young woman ought to git out of Tucson before Nunez returns."

"And how can she leave town with every mesa and peak smoking Apache war talk?" irritably demanded Yuba.

"Devil catch me by the leg if I know! Here's some folks who feel lucky."

Taking the hint, Yuba straightened and wandered to the other side of the room by moving along the walls so as to minimize the danger of a crowd attack. When Nunez came there would be five. He knew the odds should be reduced. He dared not leave the room and risk assassination in the narrow streets. He glanced around at the different gambling layouts. Ventura had disappeared. Rames and Genna were approaching a monte table.

"This is a quarrel that should not sleep," he muttered.

"What is that, Señor Yuba?" politely asked Ventura at his elbow.

It spoke well for his nerves that he did not outwardly show surprise or fear at the sudden proximity of the man.

"None of your damn' business," he answered.

He gently rocked back and forth, his fingers deep inside his sash and stared the Mexican out of countenance.

With a forced smile Ventura said:

"Pardon, señor. I thought you were sending a message to my great chief and friend."

"I give messages to a man's face," said Yuba.

"The last man who carried a disagreeable message to my illustrious captain and friend was dragged at the tail of a horse," murmured Ventura.

Yuba simulated a yawn and replied:

"Poor devil! Probably drunk and helpless from mescal."

VENTURA'S eyes flashed like those of the fer-de-lance at this insult to himself and Nunez the hated. He looked around the room. The Americans were in the ascendancy. He made a sweeping bow and glided away. Yuba stared at him somberly. He feared he had been foolish to bring himself to the cruel attention of Nunez. Then he shrugged his shoulders and philosophically murmured:

"What's to be will be. And the devil pick up the loose change."

Yet the half formed plan, interrupted by Ventura's intrusion, was taking shape. He must show no fear. He must not wait for the enemy to take the initiative. He pressed forward and dropped into a seat on Genna's left. Beyond and next to Genna sat Rames. The latter leaned forward, the pallor of his face accentuated by locks of black hair falling across his thin cheeks. He told Yuba:

"I'm interested in that girl you carried off. I'll play five thousand against her at any game you'll name. What say?"

Yuba's left hand placed a bet on the bottom layout and he waited for the gate card to be turned. He lost and placed another bet, and then told the gambler—

"I don't need five thousand dollars."

Rames' pale face showed a touch of color. He warned—

"Holding that kid will be harder than keeping your cash."

Now the gate card was of the same suit and Yuba raked in his winnings and shifted to the top layout and murmured:

"I don't just get your drift, Rames. You mean some one will take her away from me? Who?"

Rames bet the limit on the bottom layout and explained:

"The boys are talking. She doesn't belong to you any more than she belongs to me, or to Genna, here."

"Certainly not," boomed Genna's deep voice.

"*Sí?* If either you fellows have lost any property and know where it is, why don't you go and get it?" insolently inquired Yuba.

"I was thinking that same thing," said Genna.

Rames leaned across Genna's knees as if to speak. The dealer barked—

"Top layout wins."

"You lose, Rames. I'm the lucky one tonight," laughed Yuba.

He seized Rames' right wrist before the hand could pluck the murderous derringer from the left cuff.

"I win!" roared Genna, heaving himself to his feet and pulling a gun to fire down at Yuba.

With one movement Yuba jerked Rames to the floor and fired with his right hand gun, the heavy bullet catching Genna under the chin and passing out at the back of the big head.

The big finger fumbled a second at the trigger, then the huge bulk was toppling on top of Rames and flattening him to the floor. Yuba came to his feet, his second gun out. Blowing the smoke from the long barrel, he held both guns pointing at the low ceiling while he glanced about for other assailants. The onlookers appeared to be stunned by the unexpectedness of the tragedy. Rames remained quiescent on the floor, with Genna sprawled across him. With his back to the wall and moving slowly to the street, Yuba shrilly called—

"Has any one else lost any property?"

There was no answer to the challenging query, until the young man was in the street. Then came a velvet voice, crying:

"Nunez will believe he has. He will collect."

CHAPTER III

REPUDIATED

GENNA was buried the night he was killed. As there was no law and inasmuch as homicides were of common occurrence, Yuba retired, disturbed only by the possibility of the dead man's friends seeking immediate reprisal. Had it been Ventura, he would have been more disturbed; for Nunez was the center of a wide flung web of organized murder for loot and he would consider his trusted lieutenant's violent demise as an insult and a challenge.

It was midday when Yuba reconnoitered the street before his lodgings and finally emerged. In a roundabout way he proceeded to his old room to call on Miss Maury. In the alley he was met by the two Apache children, eager for their dinner, but stonily refusing to shoot their arrows at the command of a Mexican cook. Even for the sake of food they would display their marksmanship only when Yuba commanded. They felt no affection for him; but in a vague fashion they considered him as a powerful and cruel Kan, or god, and therefore to be placated. So, the moment he entered the alley, they came from hiding and ran ahead and sent their arrows at the bottles. This time they needed to shoot twice before winning their dinner.

The Mexican woman came from the adobe room. The one exposed eye rolled eloquently as she passed him. He quickened his steps, and suddenly Miss Maury appeared in the doorway, her face scarlet with some strong emotion. The moment she spoke he knew she was very angry over something. Her first words were—

"Is it true what the Mexican woman says?"

"Probably not. Marie's a wonderful liar," he slowly answered, searching his wits to guess the cause of her too evident wrath.

He waited, sombrero in hand, for her to step aside. But she remained on the threshold, her hands resting on the door casings. He stepped back and stared at her wonderingly. Already she was proving to be more than a nuisance. She had become his greatest peril.

She hurriedly went on:

"The woman's English is broken and I do not understand Spanish. But I gather from what she said that you have been

boasting since I saw you last night."

"Boasting? Possibly. I often run a bluff on some of these bullies."

"I mean that you've boasted about me," she elucidated, her face flaring crimson and her eyes misty with indignation.

"Go ahead. Explain just what you mean," he patiently urged.

With a deep intake of breath she announced—

"She says her brother told her that you've claimed I'm your woman."

She held her breath, waiting for him to speak. He smiled broadly and explained.

"It was at a monte game last night that I said that."

"You dastard!"

He winced, and angry lines made his thin lipped mouth look vicious. But his voice was smooth as velvet as he confessed:

"I'm not a good man. At least, not the soft, goody sort."

"You were evil enough to make that evil boast!" she passionately denounced.

He lost his patience. Because of her presence in Tucson a deadly vendetta was hanging over him. He sharply commanded:

"You stop your nonsense! Words can't hurt you. How long do you think you'd be safe in Tucson, providing—" His voice trailed off into silence.

She waited for him to finish, then fiercely prompted—

"Providing *what?*"

"Providing this prime mixture of cutthroats did not believe you are my woman," he stolidly completed.

SHE COULD not understand anything beyond the fact he had made the boast. She had been shocked when the Mexican woman told her she was occupying the young man's room. This resentment scarcely could bear a reasonable analysis, and yet it had hurt. It even had quickened a small suspicion that the young man had an ulterior motive in sending her to his lodging. It was easy to add the belief that his insistence that she walk about town and dine with him was all a part of his scheme to place her in a false position. She had figured it all out; but she had expected him to equivocate, or openly deny. She remained silent, because she was too enraged to speak. As she breathed rapidly and glared at him, he went on—

"Perhaps Marie didn't tell you all."

"She told me enough," was the hoarse reply.

Then she beheld a group of curious men at the mouth of the alley. In a frenzy of shame and anger she lifted her voice and called out to the loungers—

"Do any of you understand English?"

"Brought up on it, ma'am; not a greaser in the crowd," replied a tall Yankee.

"Then I want to tell you that this man Yuba has boasted I am his woman. I want you to know it's a lie. I want all Tucson to know it," she shrilly proclaimed.

"That's good hearing," loudly bawled the Yankee.

And the group began to disintegrate to announce in public places that the pretty newcomer had repudiated her protector.

Alone, the two faced each other. The girl glared defiance. Yuba's visage was distorted with anger. She waited, believing that hers was the triumph.

By a great effort Yuba regained his self control and endeavored to look upon her as something impersonal. He quietly said:

"Now you've done it. Now I must make some killings, or get rubbed out. I tried to tell you before you made that mad play that only last night, after you left the eating place, I had to kill Genna, a hulking brute and true son of the devil. Had to kill him to keep him from hunting you. I know these people. Never did a worse lot ever get together.

"There's neither law nor humanity here. And you can't get away until the next coach comes. I killed Genna to prove it was too dangerous for any one to try and take my woman from me. You haven't been hurt by what I've said.

I've given you a gun. And you've escaped Genna. Now you've spoken to the wolves and denied my protection. It all means I must give you some advice about that gun. You won't have to use it till I'm wiped out. After that, save one shot for yourself. That's the best advice I could give you, even if you were my own sister."

She stared at him dully, as if not understanding.

"They're white men. Some are Southern men. They never would dare—" she was mumbling when he sharply cut in:

"They'd dare hell and damnation to get you! Look for mercy in an Apache rancheria, but never in Tucson."

She was horrified by the cold bloodedness of his avowal. She was terrified by the finality of his insistence. She went over his words in her agonized mind. All she could say was—

"You killed a man last night!"

"Yes, one," he grimly said. "Many are left who are as bad, or worse, I mean even more dangerous than Genna."

She grabbed convulsively at the rich Mexican jacket. She tugged at the silver buttons and pleaded:

"Get me a horse! I'll ride away, now."

HE SWEPT his gaze around to count the ominous smoke signals showing high in the blue heavens over the flat roofs of the mud houses. Then he said:

"If you'd seen old Noak, brought in from down Tubac way a few days before you came here— Killed by Cochies' Chiricahua Apaches."

"I wouldn't ride south! Probably he was killed by cowardly Mexicans!"

"And cowardly Mexicans wouldn't be afraid of a woman. But he was killed by the Chiricahua. Two gold bullets were prospected out of his remains by that tall Yankee you took into your confidence a few minutes ago. Mexicans don't waste gold that way. The Apaches do."

For a last desperate defense she accused—

"Now you're trying to scare me!"

"God forbid! You'll be scared a plenty before you see the last of Tucson. Haven't you any sense? Can't you understand you're bottled up here until another stage gets through? Are you so almighty thin skinned about what these wolves may think that you can't come a game on them, so as to keep clear of them until the next Butterfield coach pulls in?"

She retreated to the hut and collapsed on the couch, her face wan, her eyes dull from sheer helplessness and hopelessness. The gesture was awkward and clumsy as she raised a hand and dabbed at a loose curl of the chestnut hair. Her lips remained parted, as if she wanted to speak.

Without advancing into the room, Yuba endeavored to arouse her from her stupor of despair by caustically telling her:

"See here. You're not pretty to look at. You look stupid. You've lost your nerve. Southern courage! You're a hell of an example!"

Her lips closed and she lifted her head.

"What can I do?" she demanded.

"Walk out. Get away from yourself a bit. Not much to see, and you can't wander from the town, as the Indians have scouts near here all the time."

"And all Tucson is afraid of a few naked Indians!"

"Los Apaches! Yes. They're more dangerous when alone, or in small bands, than when riding in a large body. If you'll step outside, just around the end of the alley, I'll show you something I found yesterday morning—something which was not there the day before."

"I can endure no more horrors," she moaned.

"Nothing like that. Simply something to teach you to respect the cunning of the Apaches."

She surprised him by rising and wearily coming from the room. In silence they proceeded to the mouth of the cul-de-sac and turned to the left, where he halted in a cluttered open space beside another mud box.

"There on the ground by the *ollas*," he said, pointing to the ground beside some water jars.

She saw nothing until he stooped and

moved his finger around an imprint in the dirt where water had been spilled. Then she made it out, the outline of a naked foot.

He explained:

"An Apache scout came in here and went away and was seen by no one. And this town never sleeps. He came to find and take away the two Apache children and did not make a kill."

"I could wish myself dead," she muttered.

He eyed her with disapproval.

"You've lived through it so far," he reminded. "We may all be dead sometime if the South, or the North, doesn't send troops to guard the Gila valley and keep the Indians back in the mountains."

"If I'd only stayed in California! If my father had only been here to meet the coach!"

He laughed grimly and advised:

"Wish for the moon or for last year's flowers. You might say, 'If only I hadn't left the coach.' "

She flew off on a tangent by fiercely demanding—

"Why did you let my father go on his mad business?"

He shrugged his shoulder and defended:

"I wasn't his keeper. Men in Tucson do as they will as far as they are able. Your father was bound to test his theory about hidden Aztec gold, the treasure Montezuma's men kept concealed from the Spaniards. Your father was not one to be stopped when he had made up his mind. He knew all the old history, all the old stories. He talked much with me."

SHE WEPT silently at this mention of her father. He paused and stared at her slim prettiness. Her emotion, now that she was not angry, disturbed him.

"See here, I'd like to give you a chance," he impulsively told her. "If I can find a chance, a fighting chance, between these Apache raids, I'll take you through to Fort Yuma and start you safe for California. It's safer that way than to go east. There's the protection of the Maricopa villages and next that of the Pima villages. The first have an Apache crucified, and at the Pima village they have one hung to a tree."

Her bearing improved. Her head came up and, eying him steadily, she quietly said:

"I will not ride with you. By your own tell you're dangerous company."

He smiled sardonically and frankly admitted:

"I'm bad. If I wasn't, you would have heard big Genna at your door last night."

The hysteria of fear had left her. She announced:

"I'm returning to the room to get the revolver. I shall walk on the river bank south of the town and watch for my father. I want to be alone."

He nodded in approval, but stipulated:

"You must keep close to the town. The Apaches are most dangerous when you don't see any signs of them."

He walked twenty feet behind her. At the entrance of the alley he halted and watched her disappear through the low doorway. Then he advanced to a group of loungers. As he came up to them the tall Yankee, returned from spreading his bit of news, drawled—

"Little woman wouldn't make up, Yuba?"

"Just a lovers' quarrel," he laughingly replied; then seriously, "Don't any of you make big Genna's mistake because of anything Miss Maury says. Women are notional. They've talked many a man into a quick grave."

"They won't talk me into a grave," stoutly declared the Yankee. "I never yet see a woman I'd die for."

As Yuba was leaving the group a man lazily called after him—

"They say Nunez is coming back mighty soon."

"I'd say any day now," was the careless rejoinder.

The Yankee expectorated his cud of tobacco and stared after the slim figure and remarked:

"One thing will never happen. Young Yuba never will pin a fight on me along of any woman."

"He'll have more fights than he can take care of," prophesied a Georgia man.

"Well, mebbe. But he'll take quite a few with him if they don't git him from behind and in the dark," decided the Yankee. "I'm moving on, so's he won't git the notion I've been pestering the young woman."

MEANWHILE Miss Maury had entered the low room, with the canvas sagging from the ceiling, and was thrusting the revolver into a small handbag. She expected to see Yuba nearby when she left the alley, but he was not in sight. With a courage born of desperation she skirted the west side of the town and did not halt until she was south of the hodgepodge of adobe shelters.

She was delighted with the view. The mile and a half wide valley of the pretty little Santa Cruz was emerald green and the fringe of mesquite and cottonwoods outlined its meager course to where it sank into the sands a mile away. And there were pomegranate trees, with their dark, waxy green foliage.

The peak of the Santa Rita was gilded with golden light. Nearby was a wrinkled Mexican woman, pounding and rubbing a washing with smooth stones at the edge of the stream. She ceased her labors and addressed the American girl in Spanish. The girl shook her head; the woman persisted. Shifting her position a few rods, the girl seated herself and stared into the south and prayed that her father might come at once.

Wherever she looked she beheld the mountains and their sinister signal smokes. She felt that many unseen watchers were staring at her. But her gaze always returned to the southward, where Coronado once led his men in armor, where fearless priests had carried the Cross and the Rosary. She could not quite shut out the creaking of the clumsy carts, hauling water into the town, or the volleys of curses hurled at wallowing hogs. As she brooded over her father's fate, swarms of bright winged humming birds passed close to her head without her being conscious of their beautiful presence.

Grim, savage pictures were passing through her mind. She saw her father beset by a horde of Apaches down beyond the silvered cone of Baboquivari; then he was being assailed by Sonoran outlaws. The Mexican woman called to her sharply several times before she emerged from her tragic abstraction. The woman had abandoned her washing and was chattering excitedly and pointing at a broken bake oven. With shrill insistence she beckoned the American girl to approach and look.

Miss Maury rose and reluctantly walked toward the oven, but halted and shivered with disgust as she discovered the woman wanted her to see a tarantula. The big spider, hideous and venomous, was strangely agitated. It required a second glance for the girl to see the "tarantula hawk"—the "devil's darning needle" of the East. The "hawk" was attacking the spider. The duel was repulsive, something abhorrent, and yet she needs must watch it. The spider reared on its hind legs and endeavored to ward off its ancient enemy. The washerwoman, rock in hand, danced about in rare excitement and urged on the winged duelist.

In Spanish she screamed the equivalent of the Romans' *hic habet*, as the "hawk," quicker than eyesight, shifted its position and stabbed the tarantula in the back, killing it.

THE MEXICAN woman contentedly returned to her washing. The girl went back to her handbag. She accepted the combat as typical of life in Tucson. Life was so unlovely, so filled with poisonous attacks. The strange duel between the minutiæ of life was sufficiently sinister to blot out the majesty of the towering peaks and the glory of the heavens.

The pounding and rubbing of the rocks on the wet clothing disturbed her and she walked along the stream toward a clump of palmilla, a pistol shot away. She examined the ground scrupulously, before venturing to sit. There was but the one

thought in her tormented mind—her father. She endeavored to make herself believe he must come before sunset, as if, by will power, she could cause him to materialize. The Mexican woman gathered up her washing and called out to her, but she did not hear.

She saw more pictures of her father, and the tragedy of his possible plight caused her, in a measure, to forget her own misfortune. At times her gaze returned to the palmilla, to list it subconsciously as a possible retreat during the hateful waking hours of waiting. She idly noticed the bunch of yucca shoots, midway between her position and the palmilla. From minutes of staring at the silvered peak of Baboquivari she would rest her tired eyes by looking at some nearby object.

Her senses quickened when she next glanced toward the clump of palmilla. The yucca shoots, she was vaguely surprised to observe, were much nearer than she had supposed. She wondered whether her vision was distorted. Then she was watching some smoke spiral in the far south and wondering what evil they spelled for her father. Were they spying on him? Did one announce his capture to the others? Then came the dread conviction that her father would never return, and her eyes became bleared with tears. She dried her eyes and fought against the terrible obsession, and suddenly found herself questioning her own sanity.

Once she might have been mistaken in the yucca shoots, but surely they could not be as near at hand as they appeared to be. They were so close that she could study them in detail. As she looked steadily she observed another phenomenon. She was beholding a glittering eye in the midst of the shoots. This had to be an illusion; but a most disturbing one. She shivered with disgust as the reality of the shining orb persisted. Then she thrilled with a horrible fear as the yucca stirred and distinctly moved. Reason told her that the clump was too insignificant to conceal anything larger than a tarantula; that vegetable growths do not possess the power of locomotion. She screamed as the shoots edged forward a bit, for she believed madness had seized upon her.

A HOARSE cry behind her, and the pounding of rapidly approaching feet, stirred her into action. She shook off the paralysis and, shrieking, stood erect. To her astonishment the yucca shoots suddenly elongated and towered above her, and they were upheld by a breach clouted figure. She collapsed in a limp heap as an Apache lance whistled close to the top of her head. Instantly there were other whistling sounds and an explosive *bang-bang;* and the plant with tawny limbs toppled over and fell with arms outstretched.

Pale as death, Yuba stood panting beside her. He fired several shots into the palmilla, but the ambush had held only the dead man with the shoots tied around his head, his naked body being somewhat disguised with clay and sand.

Firing a shot into the sprawling figure, Yuba slipped a hand under the girl's arm and, with a tug, commanded—

"Get up!"

She was weak and dizzy, and for a few minutes he had to steady her. She could not remove her horrified gaze from the dead scout, stretched out in the form of a cross. Yuba picked up the silk bag and said:

"By the heft of this doo-dad you packed a gun along. But you didn't know enough to use it. You don't need a gun. You need a guardian."

"I wanted to be alone. I find something terrible everywhere," she whimpered.

He turned her about, facing the town, and harshly commanded:

"Don't go roaming around alone again. It was by the merest chance I met the Mexican woman, Marie's mother, who told me about you watching a fight between a tarantula and a tarantula 'hawk.' Half a minute later—ten seconds later—" he did not finish.

The agony she was suffering prompted him to try rough consolation.

"After all, it's all right. No harm's done except to that red devil. Don't think any more about it."

"I'm thinking every waking minute about something horrible," she told him, speaking with an effort, with a slight pause between the words. "I do not understand why I should be punished like this."

She puzzled him. She annoyed him. He endeavored to discover a logical reason why he should assume any responsibility for her comfort or safety. Since the age of fifteen his had been a world where each was for himself. Now, because of her, he had turned Genna's friends against himself. Because she had insisted, despite his strong urging to the contrary, upon taking up her abode in a trap which caught and held humans, he must face the inevitable reckoning with Nunez, who soon would be returning. He was irritated as a sudden shift of thought told him that he, not this girl, was the enigma.

Surely there was no deceit, or subtlety, in anything she said or did. There was no denying that she was as honest as sunshine. Then why had he picked up the burden? His only explanation was his wont to back every game he entered to the limit. He decided this must be the answer. And yet it was unsatisfactory. He was vaguely conscious of other forces at work. He feared that she was arousing his pity; and in his rough world there was no room for compassion.

He picked up the lance, eight feet long and tipped with obsidian, and said—

"You can take this back East to remind you of the yucca shoots that walked; wait a minute."

Still holding the lance, he ran to the palmilla to look for more trophies. Then he felt pity, and knew it to be such, as he looked down on a child's tiny dress, gruesomely stained. The two holes and the piece of rawhide told him it had been tied to the lance as a banneret. Leaving it, he returned to the girl, and as he passed the dead Apache he kicked the body savagely.

Miss Maury gave a cry of disgust, or horror, and turned and ran back to the town. He contented himself with keeping a score of feet behind her, and he scowled furiously.

EXPLODING guns attracted but small attention in Tucson, where homicides were of common occurrence. An Indian alarm was different, however. The Mexican woman had spread the alarm, and a mob of fight hungry men were pouring from among the squat houses. The girl stood aside to let them pass, and for once was practically ignored.

The sight of Yuba with the lance aroused hoarse cheering. Then Rin Scoke, always smelling scalp bounty, discerned the silent figure of the dead scout. He circled one side, his hand on his knife. Yuba called out to him:

"Welcome to the hair. But see that you bury the body."

"Hang it to a tree the way the Pimas do!" shouted the tall Texan.

"You can do what you will with your own Injuns, Texas; but mine are buried," said Yuba. Then he turned to find the girl, but she had vanished up a narrow street.

He hurled the lance on to a flat roof and muttered:

"Just like our flowers down here. Beautiful, but no perfume."

CHAPTER IV

THE GLADIATORS

A TRUCE was agreed upon by Miss Maury and Yuba after the killing of the Apache scout. No words were spoken to this effect. It was a mutual toleration, based on the exigency of the time and place. She put aside her former hostility and conversed with him freely, almost amiably. If she retained suspicions or fears she kept them concealed. Yet he felt that she was ever on her guard and was trying to be conventional rather than companionable. The change in him was as marked as in the girl. He no

longer was curt, or domineering. He discovered that he was loath to intrude. He was annoyed by an unwonted timidity when he called to accompany her on a walk along the outskirts of the town.

She was learning to endure. While abhorring the violence and license of the place, she could steel her nerves against it in a much greater degree and bide her time. She evidenced a self dependence that she did not feel and achieved this without making harmful blunders. The walking yucca shoots had taught her a lasting lesson, the need of protection.

She was quick to notice that the rough men did not intrude when she passed through the streets, head high and her gaze impersonal. She flushed with shame, believing that the rough citizenry took it for granted that she was Yuba's woman. Yuba could have told her that Tucson was standing back, daily expecting the coming of Nunez, and that none cared to find himself in the outlaw's path.

For a week the young man and woman were outwardly natural in their daily companionship. Miss Maury studied him secretly. He, in turn, was annoyed to find his thoughts wandering from the daily bets on all matters, large and trivial. His heavy gaming was confined to the evenings. When he should have been concentrating on his opponents' behavior in a poker game he would find his thoughts straying to a head of chestnut hair. Such idiosyncrasies cost him money.

He taught her much for her convenience. He showed her how to clean drinking water by cutting up nopal, a cactaceous plant, and leaving it in a kettle of water until the mucilaginous juice precipitated all foreign matter. He endeavored to secure for her food which did not contain the ubiquitous *chile colorado*.

One day, when he happened to state that white races had been as cruel as any red people, she allowed herself to slip out of control, and criticised him sharply.

"You slander your race," she accused. "These human derelicts in this miserable town are nothing to go by. Thank God, there are but few spots as cruel as this."

He smiled tantalizingly and told her:

"Scalping isn't common to all Indian tribes. Less common when the first whites came to America. It was an ancient Scythian custom, however. The Assyrians cut off their prisoners' legs and arms. The Israelites killed children as well as grownups. The Romans crucified, head downward. Within a hundred years England was killing traitors in a way which would shock an Apache, or a Sioux. And I could go on with a lot more."

"You needn't. I do not believe it," she indignantly told him.

She was further annoyed by his obvious amusement. He was chuckling.

"You know you are making up that stuff," she added.

"You don't know your history," he taunted. Then with a grin that made him look very boyish he confessed, "I didn't know mine until your father told me. If it's stuff, then he made it up. He told me a lot more that I did not know. He says the white races can give our reds all four aces and then beat them to a standstill when it comes to devil's work."

Her expression softened and she said:

"If my dear father said it, it is so. He never happened to tell it to me."

"He never told you about Montezuma's treasures. He will when he gets back."

The sadness of her gaze as she turned and looked to the south was pathetic, as was the little catch in her voice as she murmured—

"Yes, when he gets back."

THE MONOTONY of living in the town of dried mud occasionally drove a man insane. Riding in sufficient numbers, each a terrible fighting machine, madmen escaped from their adobe prison. But such flight would only bring them under a noose in California or Texas. The majority hoped civil war would come to erase the past and leave them free to leave the Territory. It now happened that the humdrum routine of gaming, getting drunk and miserably dying, was broken by the capture of an Apache

woman, found concealed under weeds close to the wall of a corral. The news spread rapidly, and gaming rooms and mesacal shops emptied patrons to the west side of the town.

It also happened that Miss Maury and Yuba were returning from a walk and came along as the crowd was gathering around the wretched prisoner. Rin Scoke was proudly and loudly proclaiming:

"I catched the she devil! She's my property!"

"That beast is mistreating some poor woman!" the girl excitedly told her companion.

Yuba frowned. He had piled up enough enmities without incurring more. He sought to conduct her back to her room, but the fact that one of her sex was in trouble outweighed all timidity, all fear. She took the lead in working a way through the clamorous throng.

"An Indian woman!" she exclaimed as she stared down on the copper colored, expressionless face showing at one end of a cocoon of tightly tied ropes.

From over the broken corral wall she caught a fleeting glimpse of the two Apache children.

Scoke ceased his boasting to turn and tell the girl:

"You're dead right, young lady. This devil come a-sneaking in to steal the two little devils we're holding prisoners. But I nabbed her!"

"Come away," urged Yuba.

She held her ground and demanded—

"What do you think you'll do with the poor creature?"

Scoke opened his mouth in a grin and answered—

"I'm three hundred dollers' better off then I was half a hour ago."

She had learned enough of his history to catch his meaning. She fiercely demanded of the man on her right—

"Will you stand by and allow such terrible work?"

The man smiled grimly and coolly replied:

"I may stand by, and I mayn't. But I ain't lost any female red hellions."

Yuba seized her arm and pulled her back and insisted—

"Come away!"

She struggled for a moment, then burst into tears, and with head bowed went with him to the entrance of the alley, where he halted. With her eyes blind from weeping she piteously begged of him—

"You won't let that terrible man harm that poor thing?"

"It's beastly," he muttered, feeling most uncomfortable. "But no one man, nor a hundred, can improve this town any."

"But think of it!" she cried. "She came to get these two terrible babies! At least, that was human. It's monstrous, unthinkable, that white men can kill even an Apache woman. If they can do that, I don't need to be told by my father that the white race is more cruel than the red. And that awful scalp man! He can't do it! They won't let him do it."

He stared helplessly down into her weeping eyes and in his thoughts cursed Scoke into the nether regions.

"But why don't you say you'll stop it?" she pleaded.

"Look here," he gruffly said. "If I get wiped out, you'll receive about as much mercy as that squaw. Not quite as much. They won't kill you."

"Never mind me," she cried. "She came for those babies. Go and make them set her free!"

"Now you rein in," he rebelled. "It's not as easy as that. I'd be riddled like a sieve if I tried that game. The squaw is Scoke's prisoner; not mine. Only a short time ago an Apache tried to murder you. He already had killed a white baby. The poor little dress, stained, was in the palmilla. It was too awful to show you."

"You were kind not to let me see, or know," she sobbed. "But that was a man. This is a woman. I don't want you to risk your life. But isn't there some way you can stop the terrible crime? For my sake?"

The last three words doubtlessly were intended only as an additional rhetorical

gesture. But they jarred Yuba from head to heel. He had cajoled and threatened. He had been abusive to force her to do the sane thing. She had rebelled and had displayed dislike when he was working for her own good. Never before had she pleaded with him in such a fashion.

IT REQUIRED a moment for him to steady his voice. Then he quietly told her:

"It doesn't take much courage for me to go back there and shoot it out until I am killed. That's the risk I've ran ever since coming to Tucson. But my death won't help the squaw, nor the kids. If you were a prisoner of the Apaches, none would be more pleased than she."

"I mean by trickery. Free her by trickery," she eagerly urged. "You're a gambler. You're used to winning by trickery."

"You have a high opinion of me as a gambler: also, of the men I play with. See here. These people are hard to fool. But I'll make a bargain with you. Win, or lose—and I'll do my best—you must pay a price. You must chip in something more than pity."

"What is it?" she asked. Then, before he could speak, she said:

"I'll pay. You wouldn't ask anything that would harm me."

"You're dead right. The price is this. You must take the first stage that comes in, whether for the West, or the East. This for my trying to free the squaw. If I fail, you must do as you agree. But if I fail and am caught at it, then God help you!"

"I believe in God, even here in Tucson. I agree. I'll back down and not wait for my father. But how will you do it?"

"Try to do it," he corrected. He frowned and removed his hat and rubbed his head, as if he could rub away his perplexity.

"That's the devil of it. If it was Rames, I'd gamble for her. Scoke won't do that. It won't do to try and buy her, for if he refused I'd be suspected the moment she disappeared. You go to your room. I'll walk about a bit and think."

"If you do this, I'll never forget."

"If I win this pot I'll never forget," he replied, laughing mirthlessly.

"And you'll run no unnecessary risks?" she anxiously asked.

"Oh, there'll be no risk," he confidently assured her.

She gazed steadily into his face for half a minute, then suddenly said:

"You'll win. I know it. I can feel it. You'll win."

And with a confident nod of her chestnut thatched head she ran up the alley.

"Win like hell!" he muttered as he watched her vanish into the room and close the door. "And if I don't make the play?"

HE SAUNTERED back to the motionless cocoon and the exulting Scoke and wandered along the edge of the curious crowd. Like a drunken man Scoke was repeating over what he already had told several times. In detail he described how he happened to stumble upon the woman, of her tigerish fight, and how he had subdued her. A lump the size of an egg on her dark forehead testified eloquently to his technique. To the great majority of the castaways the prisoner was on the plane of a dangerous wild animal. The Mexicans were eager to see her being tortured, for they were remembering the many shallow graves, marked by crosses of mesquite, and the many prisoners carried away from old Mexico.

Leaning against the broken wall, close by where the two children were crouching, Yuba quickly realized that he could not buy the woman. Even did he overcome Scoke's savagery with hard money the mob would never permit her to go free. The gathering gave relishful attention to Scoke's fierce boasting, and cheered him, insisting that he tell it again; and then he laughed hoarsely as he went over the facts once more. As Yuba leaned an elbow on the wall and endeavored to think of some workable plan, his fingers brushed against the knife under his sash and worn over his right hip.

Trickery? He had resented the girl's words as an insult from the ignorant. He prided himself on being a square gambler, except when he was playing with wolves. He gazed at the woman curiously. She might have been dead, as far as any change in facial expression revealed the contrary. His fingers slowly closed over the haft of the knife and slowly drew it from the sheath. The blade was clear, and with his gaze on the crowd he worked it up his sleeve. When Scoke ended another ferocious speech and as the audience rocked with laughter, shaggy heads thrown back, Yuba held his arm over the rocks and allowed the knife to drop between the two children.

After a minute's wait he turned to go and darted his gaze over the wall. The knife and the two children had vanished. Passing along the hem of the crowd he halted by the tall Texan and carelessly inquired—

"Just when does the butchery take place?"

"Scoke reckons on this evening. Plans to make sort of a show of it. The snake oughter be rubbed out, of course; but Scoke oughter done it on the spot when he found it. He's too damn' cold blooded. Still, it's his prisoner."

YUBA returned to the deserted town and walked aimlessly. He could not see how he could have done more. Perhaps the night would afford another and a better plan. He wanted to call on Miss Maury and tell her what he had done, but refrained, as he believed she wished to be alone. He wondered how many times he had heard her use that word—alone. He went to his room and gave the daily inspection to his guns. He filled the empty sheath with another knife and then threw himself down to sleep until dusk.

He hurried to the big gaming room and to the Texan's faro bank. There were no customers and the proprietor was smoking a corncob and willing to converse. There could be but one subject of conversation and the Texan introduced it by saying:

"You've been asleep. If Scoke had stuck to his program, you'd missed the fun."

"Then nothing's happened?"

"No, he ain't killed it yet. Been busy hunting for the two kids. Most the men been helping. Plumb gone, both of 'em. Some reckon they busted loose and went to find some 'Paches to rush the town. Sly little devils, them kids. They could hide behind a wart."

"Where's Scoke keeping the squaw?"

"In the room where they put Noak while they was digging his grave. Scoke don't hunger for that room, along of a dead man once stayin' there. Yet he stands guard. Sits out front smokin' his pipe—an' waitin'. As if there was a room in Tucson that hadn't had a dead man in it!"

"He's a cold blooded beast. Does he plan to murder her with the crowd looking on?"

"How you talk, Yuba. Don't let the boys hear any of that lingo. That 'Pache critter ain't human any more'n a snake is. And didn't he catch it?"

"I'm just saying I'll chip in with guns if he tries any game on the two kids. It's enough for him to have killed their folks."

Quite exasperated, the Texas warned:

"Yuba, I want to be your friend. But I can't stand any more talk like that. You know 'Paches never was, never will be human bein's. Me, myself, couldn't in cold blood kill that critter. But that's my tender makeup. Scoke can, and will. Any one who's seen how they handle a prisoner would sing while doin' it."

"I reckon you're right Texas. But if ever Scoke falls into the hands of the Apaches even the devil would pity him."

Rames came along and in his listless, flat voice announced:

"Boys are going to catch some prime red and black ants tomorrow and have a fight. That is, if they don't decide to let Scoke have them."

"What could Scoke do with them?" asked Yuba.

Rames smothered a yawn and answered—

"Maybe he'll keep the squaw alive till tomorrow and try the ants on her."

Yuba winced, then scornfully derided:

"A fine way to waste prime ants. They couldn't hurt the squaw. I'll back the reds against the blacks in a fight for five hundred dollars."

"That bet's covered," quickly said Rames. "The rules have been agreed on, if they decide on an ant fight, and you've bet blind."

Not since Genna's death had the two men displayed any hostility when meeting. Tucson was too small for empty gestures. Yet Yuba watched the gambler closely as he lazily asked—

"Just what are the rules?"

"Three blacks for every red." The gambler smiled coldly.

"The bet's made. And I'd say the odds are about right. Blacks haven't the fighting guts the reds have."

"Ventura's hunting for red ant money," carelessly informed Rames.

YUBA did some quick thinking. Rames would never pass over any part of any acceptable wager. Yuba began to sense something more important than an ant-fight. This form of sport was common and it was well known that one red ant usually could kill two blacks. There was a game behind it all. Rames had a well defined purpose in hunting him up and making a wager. He believed the smoldering feud between them was about to burst into flames. He told the gambler:

"Ventura's hunt is ended when he gets to me. I'll bet another five hundred on the reds, if they're turned into the pan in good condition. When do they fight?"

"If Scoke don't want to hold over and use them, it'll be after tomorrow's siesta. New smoke in the southeast. The boys reckon the westbound coach is trying to get through and that the Apaches are holding it up."

"The last stage through was sure to tell conditions here. Butterfield will send a strong guard. If the smoke means a coach, I'll bet a hundred it pulls through."

"Taken," snapped the gambler.

"Texas, you're a witness to the bets. Or you can hold the stakes if Rames wishes—"

A wild howl in front of the gaming room cut off the rest of the sentence. The howl was quickly caught up and became a terrible chorus of yells and curses. Yuba suggested—

"Let's go out and investigate."

Rames was agreeable. He fully realized that the young man did not care to turn his back in gaining the street. They went side by side, and at once found themselves separated by surging files of excited men. Yuba asked the man beside him—

"What's the matter?"

"That damn' squaw's loose! Busted clear! Gone with the two kids! Comes of waiting and making a game of it," bellowed the man.

Yuba's first sensation was a great relief that the woman had escaped, thereby saving Miss Maury's peace of mind. But as he listened to the confusion he experienced fear. The mob was a wild animal. Something besides the woman's escape had happened. When the head of the column reached the room which had served as the woman's jail the mélange of curses, threats and meaningless yells gave Yuba no inkling as to the cause. By wriggling and squirming he managed to advance nearly to the front line of infuriated men.

Then those in the room and around the door began lustily bawling out for the packed mass to separate and permit egress for those would "fetch it out."

Ventura, moving his arms like a swimmer, headed the wedge which finally split the mob with a narrow lane. The lanky Yankee behind Ventura kept crying:

"Give us room, won't ye? Then you can all see. Fall back to the plaza where there's plenty of room.

The hindmost in the gathering began shouting:

"To the plaza! To the plaza!" There followed a stampede in that direction. Torches suddenly bloomed and swayed over the heads of the curious and excited.

All were thrilled by the realization that the deadly monotony of the isolated town was to be broken. The bulk of the citizens were rushing to the plaza when several men came from the room, carrying a burden. Yuba, who had tarried, was startled to behold the dead face of Scoke peering from a blanket. He had been scalped.

Yuba knew all about it without visiting the plaza. The terrible midgets had entered the room through the small window and had used the knife. The squaw, finding herself free, had stolen through the doorway and had killed the unsuspecting guard. Then she had emulated him by taking the scalp.

BY THE time the dead man was being put on exhibition at the torch lighted plaza Yuba was at the entrance of the alley and whistling a signal to the Mexican woman. She was at his side in an instant, having been waiting there, scarcely able to remain, as her burning curiosity urged her to investigate.

She spoke first, crying:

"What is it? What is happening? My señorita would know."

"Tell the señorita that the Apache woman has escaped," he said. "Don't leave her."

He hastened to the gaming room and, with his back to a wall, waited. He was worried about his knife. He wondered if by any chance it had been found. He did not believe that danger possible unless the escaped prisoner was almost caught in her act of vengeance. He did not believe the knife could be proven to be his, even if found. And yet there were men who would be glad to swear to that fact. His next sensation was one of mingled regret and exultation. The girl had promised. He would miss her. Yet he rejoiced that she was returning on the next stagecoach to California before Nunez arrived with his bravos.

The smokes in the southeast must mean the coming of the stage; and never had he wanted to win a bet in all his life as he did his last one with Rames. For a few moments he pictured himself bearing her company as far as the Colorado crossing. He tore this vision from his mind and called himself a fool. California was sealed to him, and parting from her at the Colorado would be as difficult, perhaps more so, than in Tucson.

"Well, I turned the trick," he muttered.

The rumbling laughter of the tall Texan faro dealer caught his ear. He had been so submerged in his thoughts that he had failed to notice the entrance of the man. He called out to him—

"Something comical has happened?"

With a prefatory guffaw the Texas replied:

"Just thinking; that's all. Now it's all over I was just thinking how cussed funny it all is. Scoke sculped after selling sculps for more'n a year! Don't you call that a prime joke?"

"We shall miss Rin Scoke," Yuba gravely replied.

"Like hell!" snorted the Texan. "Not that I'm going a-hooting up 'n' down the street. But the boys don't care what happened to Rin Scoke. But they be fussed up by the notion that some one in this town cut that 'Pache critter loose 'n' give her a knife. And some be gittin' s'picious." He paused and stared at Yuba, who assumed his poker expression and waited.

The Texan cast a glance around the room and motioned him to draw close. After Yuba gained his side the Texan bowed his head and whispered—

"Two or three of the boys are saying that Ventura turned the trick to git in good with the 'Paches."

"Ah!" murmured Yuba. "I'd never thought of that. But it would be a clever play to make. For the time is coming when he and his master must have some friendly rancheria to hide in to escape a bullet, or a rope."

"It's what's bein' whispered," softly continued the Texan. "Time may come when they can shout it out loud; but not now. After Nunez has run into a streak of hard luck. That's it. Then that

greaser will wish himself far away. The boys won't forgit."

On his way to his room early that night Yuba halted at the mouth of the alley and whistled shrilly. Almost immediately the door opened and Marie came to him. He told her:

"The men think the westbound stage-coach is coming through. The Apaches are making new smokes in the direction of the San Pedro crossing. Tell it to the señorita and say I shall expect her to keep her promise."

NEXT morning he ate a late and hurried breakfast and then presented himself at his old room. Miss Maury, for once, was impatient for his coming. Her first words were:

"I thought you were never coming. I've had my breakfast and dinner. I sent Marie to learn if anything had happened to you. We'll walk to the plaza."

She was burning to ask questions, but he discouraged her until they were clear of the houses and in no danger of being overheard.

"You succeeded!" she softly exclaimed as they halted. "Marie told me that terrible Scoke was killed by the Indian woman."

He bowed and grimly added—

"With my knife."

She gave a little shudder and whispered:

"Marie says the town is aroused. About the way the woman escaped. The cords were cut with a knife. It will be bad for you if they find the knife and identify it as yours. You must go with me to California. My boxes and carpet-bag are packed."

He moodily shook his head and said:

"Two reasons against my going. California might remember me. Some here believe Ventura furnished the knife to gain favor with the Apaches. The first reason is enough to hold me here."

"California has forgotten," she argued. "You were caught up in the move to drive out many bad characters. But there's a great difference between a young gambler and a robber and a murderer. Besides, you wouldn't be a gambler if you went back."

He smiled his twisted smile and slowly shook his head. He advised her to take her siesta while he moved about the town with ears open. While admitting that she had slept but poorly, owing to the woman's escape and the death of Scoke, she preferred to walk south of the town. He insisted that she get her rest and reminded her that if the new smokes had been correctly read the westbound coach would soon pull in and there would be days of arduous travel.

HE LEFT her at the alley and moodily repaired to the Texan's faro table and lost several hundred dollars. The Texan was in high good humor. He came to one of those rare occasions in his haphazard life wherein he deliberately refused to mind his own business. The room was practically empty and only Yuba was at his table. Leaning forward he hoarsely whispered:

"Something's cookin'. Something hitched up with that ant fight. It's to be held at the mouth of the alley just before sunset."

"What's queer about that? They'll have to hold it somewhere."

He read the misgivings in the Texan's gray eyes. He was quick to read the man's hesitation. He knew the friendly impulse was being combatted by the instinct of self preservation. The Texan made his decision, and under his breath replied:

"You know, Yuba, if you make any talk about what I say, I'll stop a bullet. But here's the layout. Rames 'n' Ventura are gunnin' for you. Ventura don't want his chief to think he didn't have guts enough to cook your dish. The ant fight will be the time for them to show their hands. It was planned for that from the first. They want you in a crowd. I heard a word or two dropped by different skunks. I put 'em together. They didn't 'mount to anything alone, but read in a bunch they spelled a heap. There'll be some argument. Then some jostling 'n'

crowding 'n' and shoving round. No one paying any attention to you, mind you. But you'll find yourself jostled 'n' crowded. Suddenly, when everyone's excited you'll be jumped. Ventura don't care if it looks like an accident in a crowd fight, or what. So long's you're rubbed out."

"Thanks, Texas. I'll never forget."

"Don't go near the alley. If it wa'n't for that cussed Nunez I'd throw down two guns to back your game. But I don't want Nunez after me. Never reckoned the time would come when I'd be scared of a greaser. But it has. But you keep away. That'll fetch 'em out in the open. Give you a chance to back your hand."

"Good advice, Texas. I'll remember if ever you need the help of my guns."

He went to his room long enough to shift his guns to shoulder holsters, a device of his own. Then he walked south of the town as far as the spot where he had killed the Apache scout. The great worry in his mind was the possiblity of being killed before the coach came to take Miss Maury away. He weighed the Texan's advice, but life had taught him the best way to clear trouble from his path was to face it, instead of running and having it dogging his heels.

He circled to the west side of the town to where a group of men were obtaining the warriors for the sunset battle. They had made holes in two nests, which were three feet high and six feet long. A wide mouthed bottle, containing a smear of black fig syrup, was inserted in each opening. As considerable money was wagered on the battle only enough ants were taken to be easily counted. As Yuba trailed behind the committee on arrangements he wondered somberly how the fight within a fight would terminate. He knew his own feud, like the ancient enmity between the red and black insects, must be *guerre à mort.*

AT THE mouth of the alley more men were congregated than could possibly view the contest. The Texan was appointed to officially announce the progress of the battle, and favored positions were allotted to those who had most at stake. The Texan glanced regretfully at Yuba as he made this announcement and slightly moved his head from side to side. But to remain on the outskirts of the crowd would be to run away, and Yuba pressed close to the big pan. Rames was there and in his mechanical voice inquired—

"Got any more red money?"

"I think I have enough up as it is," said Yuba, as he folded his arms with his fingers just inside the lapels of his jacket.

Rames was on his right. Ventura came through the crowd and halted on his left. The Texan was across the circle, his long face wearing a gloomy expression, his gaze shifting uneasily. Between him and the Mexican and Rames were several men, none of whom Yuba could count as a friend. The Texan could not understand how his young friend had walked deliberately into as pretty a trap as ever was set. He heavily announced—

"If every one's drawn cards we'll start things movin'."

Yuba craned his head forward a trifle, as if eager to watch the pan. A side glance took in the butt of a gun over Ventura's right hip. Ventura frowned slightly as he darted a glance at Rames, who, with a derringer of big bore in the cuff of his left sleeve, was in a more favorable position to attack the common enemy.

"Let them out, Texas! Here's where I win!" boisterously cried Yuba.

"That is something to be seen, my friend," murmured Ventura.

The Texan drawled:

"There's twenty reds 'n' sixty blacks. All able-bodied critters 'n' as mad as sin. Here goes!"

THE TWO bottles were turned up and gently shaken and tapped, until all the tiny gladiators were in the shallow arena. With head slightly bowed Yuba divided his quick glances between the Mexican's gun and the gambler's two

hands. He quickened with expectancy whenever Rames' hands came together. The fight opened in the pan, with the red ants commencing the battle. The foray became twenty separate duels. The crowd cheered as the Texan attempted to keep track of these and officially announce the results. The red ants were much the more belligerent and were quick to carry the fight to the enemy. Nor did a red fighter hesitate to engage two or three of the blacks.

"Five reds have kicked the bucket," bawled the referee. Cheers interrupted him. "I count twelve blacks that's cashed in 'n' three what are on the edge of the grave." Louder cheers greeted the conclusion.

"Ants are alive so long as they can move. Only dead ones count," yelled a backer of the blacks.

"Feel yourself slipping, señor?" softly asked Ventura with a flash of his white teeth.

"I feel like a winner, Señor Ventura," answered Yuba; and he glanced to his right to see if Rames was taking advantage of the exchange.

The gambler was watching the pan. Yuba believed the Texan was right in stating that a quarrel between two or more men in the inside circle would preface any attempt at assassination. He waited, nerves taut, for the first symptoms of discord.

"Eleven reds gone over the ridge. Thirty-two blacks likeways," hoarsely bellowed the Texan.

After the cheering ceased a man next to the Texan protested:

"Reckon you're mistook in the count. One of them black's still kicking."

"Kicking, hell!" derided another. "Keep your yawp shut!"

Yuba's fingers advanced an inch under the jacket.

"Takes a better man then you to close my yawp!" challenged the first speaker.

Then they fell to and clinched and broke the circle. They pushed violently against a man who collided with the next, and the impetus of the contacts reached Ventura, who bumped against Yuba. The latter surged backward despite the pressure behind him and drew his two guns and shot Ventura through the body even as the latter was about to press a trigger.

The Mexican was held upright by the pressure of the surging mob. And Yuba, the instant he fired, went down on one knee and turned to shoot Rames with his left hand gun. He was knocked flat and was stepped on. Rames, seeing Ventura erect and Yuba down, believed the latter was dead. He broke away and ran up the alley where Marie in the open doorway was screaming wildly. The Maury girl gave the woman a violent push and leaped over the threshold, her chestnut hair disheveled, her blue eyes blazing. She believed she had witnessed Yuba's death. Now she saw only Rames coming toward her, his hooked fingers reaching toward her.

"Right of capture!" he panted.

Still running to meet him she brought her hand up from her side and shot him off his feet, and without slackening her pace she plunged into the milling mob, a fury of a woman. She struck right and left with the gun barrel and cocked the weapon to shoot just as Yuba managed to crawl to his feet.

CHAPTER V

SOLVING EQUATIONS

THE GIRL no longer shunned the place where the red scout was killed. The clump of palmilla agitated her none. Yesterday's tragic experience had erased all that. For the tenth time since they halted on the bank of the Santa Cruz she told Yuba—

"It was terrible."

For the tenth time he corrected—

"It was wonderful."

"He was a mad beast. I never shall feel sorry," she defended.

He looked into her pale face sharply and said:

"See here. No more of that. No more

trying to excuse yourself for one of the best things you ever did. Understand that. Had I been wiped out, and had you lacked sand and brains enough to defend yourself—" He did not need to finish.

"I'll not excuse myself, nor defend myself," she slowly told him. "I shall not feel sorry. But I do feel as if some giant had taken me by the shoulders and had shaken me to pieces."

"That'll soon leave you," he assured her.

"But it was his life or mine," she persisted. Then with a little hysterical laugh that saved her from weeping she cried—

"I wonder how much more like that I must go through."

"There'll be no more," he soothed. "They'll step carefully from now on. They've learned you're not a namby-pamby woman. They'll respect you now and give you the inside of the walk. Pack along your gun and the sewing bag and you can go where you will—in the daytime. No one will trouble you any more."

"That's because of you. I've been thinking."

He eyed her suspiciously as she sat with her gaze fixed on her hands.

"Er huh?" he prompted.

"I've been thinking," she explained, "there's no need for me to go away now those two awful men are—gone."

"There's your promise," he sharply reminded, "and there's Nunez. Wait. Don't misunderstand me. Don't think I'm trying to scare you by talking about Nunez. I solemnly tell you that if ever the devil walked the earth it is in the person of Nunez. Ventura, Rames and all the others were fools, cowards and blunderers when stacked up alongside of him. When he comes and finds his right hand man dead he'll act up. Tucson men will keep low till his black spell is ended. He'll want blood. And I can't be hampered by a woman when I play against him."

"And you'll stay here to meet him," she shrilly denounced. "You'll make that choice."

"But I have no other choice," he patiently told her. "When war comes and little things are forgotten it will be different. Yes, I must stay."

"I'll break my promise. I'll not go unless you go. No one in California will remember you. You needn't linger there. You can go to Utah, or Colorado. If you stay here you'll be killed. If you're killed it will be because of helping me."

"But a promise is a promise! You promised—"

"It's a waste of time to talk about it," she quietly broke in. "I'll not have your death to answer for."

"Then a promise means nothing to you?"

"Under the circumstances not so much as that." And she snapped her fingers. "Since I said I would go, conditions have changed. So, when the stagecoach comes in, we'll both go."

He eyed her helplessly, and bitterly said—

"If that is all your promises amount to!"

She readily conceded—

"Absolutely all it amounts to as conditions are now."

"Very well. To save you I must go."

She became more animated, now that she had won her point. She told him:

"Father and I have friends of influence in California. No one will bother you."

"Under your protection, eh?" he grumbled.

"And why not?" she placidly countered. "Not much to be beholden for, after I've gotten you into all this trouble."

"Oh, I'll quit. I'll go with you. Anything to get you out of this place."

Her attention was elsewhere now, and she was staring down the valley road. Suddenly she stretched out her hand to point and excitedly cried:

"What is it that glitters? It moves. An Indian shield?"

"Indian shields are made of hide. They don't glitter," he told her as he shaded his eyes and looked to the south. "Something is in motion," he agreed. "And it shines at times almost as brightly as a mirror. It's too far away for me to make it out. We'll go back into town."

"Then it's something to be afraid of?" she asked.

"I'm always shy of anything I don't understand. It must be Nunez and his men. Some of his followers wear much finery. He wears none."

THEY entered the town and Yuba insisted that she go to her room and remain there until he could bring assurances that no new danger menaced them. He rapidly returned to the south side of the town. He satisfied himself that the phenomenon was caused by a moving object which reflected blazing streaks of sunlight. Several men joined him to study the intermittent flares of dazzling light. One of these insisted:

"Some one on a hoss. And only one."

Yuba breathed more freely. Nunez would not come alone. Then the cottonwoods and mesquite shut off further sight of the traveler until he should be close by.

The watchers increased in number, each newcomer demanding to be told the reason for the gathering. A keeper of a mescal shop shouted:

"Here it comes! But what 'n hell is it?"

Yuba blinked his eyes for a bit as a horseman came into full view.

"Man in armor!" he yelled. "Don't shoot, you fools! He's a white man."

The horseman turned toward the gathering. The tall Texan was the first to recognize him. He shouted—

"Cuss me if it ain't old Montezuma, as big as life and twice as natural!"

Yuba peered incredulously for a moment. But there was no denying the blue eyes, the grizzly whiskers. Rushing forward, he joyously greeted:

"Montezuma! How did you ever get through?"

Maury, wearing pieces of armor, dismounted from his tired horse and removed his helmet and moped his head. Pleased as a child with a new toy he patted the helmet and replied:

"Isn't it wonderful, Yuba. Also these?" And he caressed the breastplate and gorget. He would have patted the backplate, but could not reach it.

YUBA seized the hand between his and pumped the arm up and down. It was difficult to believe that Potts Maury, missing for more than a month, was alive. Beaming upon the gaping men Maury advanced, leading his jaded mount and enthusiastically announced:

"Undoubtedly this armor was worn by Coronado's men in the 1541 expedition into New Mexico. My friend, the governor of Sonora, insisted it was worn in the expedition of Don Antonio Espejo, who penetrated New Mexico in 1581, or belonged to one of Don Juan de Onate's force in 1582. He is entirely wrong, and I told him so. It's a relic of Coronado's expedition. Now here is my proof."

"What about treasure?" bellowed the Texan.

"Your daughter is here in Tucson," added Yuba.

"Philena here? Good. Excellent. I hope she has not found it too dull. Treasure? Oh, there's plenty of that. As the Apaches are quite active along the Border, and as I could bring only what a horse could carry, in addition to my person, the treasure had to wait. But this is the real treasure. So little Philena came through on schedule? Excellent. I must show her these trappings of three hundred years ago."

"How'd you dodge the 'Paches?" some one demanded.

"Some rode up and then rode away. They must have taken me for a ghost of the long ago. I laughed heartily at the idea. No, I wasn't bothered by them. Where is little Philena?"

"Come along! Come along!" growled Yuba. "Don't you know this isn't a good place for a young woman to stay in?"

"Tush! Never see a Tennessee Maury yet who couldn't get along anywhere."

"Jumpin' hoptoads!" weakly cried the tall Texan.

"Nunez and his men will be here any time," Yuba warned.

Potts Maury patted his breastplate and said:

"Never see any equation yet that I couldn't solve. If Nunez is a factor in

any equation requiring my consideration, so much the worse for Nunez. But you men don't seem to appreciate how much patience and time it required for me to remove the grime and rust of centuries before I could bring this priceless war harness up to its present excellence. A bit dusty from travel, I grant you."

"Your daughter is waiting for you," broke in Yuba impatiently. "She has been eating her heart out while you've been scrubbing that thingamagig."

"And working mostly with ashes, Yuba. Working always at a disadvantage," proudly interrupted Maury.

"She has been suffering tortures for fear the Apaches had caught you," the young man continued.

"A woman's whimish way," placidly commented Maury. "She'll forget all that silliness when she sees what I've brought back."

"Hi, Montezuma! Was there any gold down there? Hidden gold?" hungrily cried the keeper of a mescal bar.

"Gold? Oh, an abundance. In plates that came from the inside walls of temples and in bars. Some day I shall go back and bring out a load. Well, Yuba, if the little girl is waiting, we'll leave the horse here and go to her. You can help me off with the backplate. The rest I can manage myself. There isn't a doubt in my mind but that I can prove to the satisfaction of any body of men, qualified to weigh my evidence, that Coronado was the first white man ever to enter the valley of the Platte, not far from Plum Creek, Nebraska."

"In plates and bars!" hoarsely cried the mescal man, "and in *loads!* And see what he's fetched back!"

FOLLOWED by a clamorous crowd, Potts Maury and Yuba walked through the town. Maury belittled his gold discoveries, except as they might provide some means of estimating the Aztec's plane of culture. What he insisted to be new facts concerning the Sixteenth Century Spanish explorers he stressed as being most important. At no time during the walk to the alley did he express any surprise that his daughter had broken her journey to wait for him, or that his failure was out of the ordinary.

"You rake in the pot," gasped Yuba, as they entered the alley and the curious crowd held back. "You win. Don't bother to show your hand. Just pick up the chips. She's in my old room. The nearest to being decent I knew of. I'll come around later."

He turned away as the door of the room opened and the girl came running to meet her father. Maury fondly threw an arm around her, but did not relinquish his hold on the pieces of armor. The girl, clinging to his arm, walked with dancing steps.

Yuba rejoiced, because great happiness had come to the girl, but his own state of affairs remained as disjointed as ever. Maury's absorption in his exploration and the various resulting theories nonplused the young man. He found tragedy in the man's inability to perceive the deadly menace of Nunez. As he moodily made for his favorite eating place a man on a flat roof attracted his attention by pointing and gesticulating. It required but a minute to climb up beside him. The slight advantage in elevation permitted him to see dust riddled clouds down the stage road.

"The Butterfield coach is coming!" he cried.

He turned to descend and warn Philena Maury to be ready to take her father back to California, when the man exclaimed:

"That's queer!"

Turning back Yuba asked—

"What's queer?"

"I reckon it ain't the stage. Look! Two hossmen riding ahead."

Two dots were clear of the cloud. Others came into view, but the dust disgorged no stagecoach. Still Yuba would not surrender.

"A heavy guard comes ahead," he said.

"Good land! There's five men in a string, but where's the coach?" babbled the other watcher.

Yuba shaded his eyes and watched. There was no stagecoach. He remained

on the roof until the newcomers were close enough for him to see they were long haired, desperate looking men.

"From Texas!" he shouted as he descended to the street.

He was among the first to meet the little cavalcade. They were men sent ahead by Colonel John R. Baylor. They brought Baylor's promise that a strong force would soon arrive and put a stop to the Indian raids and secure the Territory for the new South. Fort Sumter had been fired upon. President Lincoln had called for seventy-five thousand men. War was on!

Cheers greeted the news, and nearly all in Tucson sympathized with the new Confederacy. After half an hour of excited queries and wild cheering, one of the newcomers happened to remember another item. It was to the effect that there would be no more stagecoaches between California and the East, via Arizona, inasmuch as the Butterfield Mail Company had shifted the route to the north.

HEARING this, Yuba hastened to the Maurys and related all he had heard. The girl clutched the bosom of her gown and gaped in silence. Her father, polishing the gorget of his trophy lifted his head long enough to remark:

"I'm needed in Tennessee. We'll get horses and start for New Mexico."

"You'll go with us?" anxiously asked the girl of Yuba.

"Yes, I'll go back and fight for the South."

"You naturally would, Yuba," mumbled Potts Maury as he cocked his head to inspect the gorget. He put it aside and picked another piece and requested, "Please see the work on this helmet. See all these little brass nails. Had no acids. Had to depend on ashes mostly. Think of the patience it required to polish them! The nails alone probably delayed me ten days." And he glanced proudly from his daughter to Yuba.

"Isn't he wonderful!" murmured the girl; then sternly, "Father, you're very dear, but rather silly. Put that stuff away and come with us to eat. Times have been more exciting with us than with you. A big war is soon to be fought, probably is being fought now."

"Have you told him you were forced to kill Rames, the gambler?" asked Yuba.

The girl shook her head. Her father quickly said:

"Killed Rames? Well, well. Then I know he needed killing. You did as I should wish you to do, Philena. But if he couldn't wait for me to handle, you should have turned him over to Yuba."

The girl briefly explained the circumstances which resulted in Rames' and Ventura's taking off. Her father nodded his head and said—

"Of course."

Then he was bruskly telling Yuba:

"Secure some horses. The one I rode here is too played out. We must get away at once. I shall raise a regiment. We'll need an extra animal for the armor and a few other valuable relics."

Yuba nodded and stared blankly at the girl. She was between tears and laughter. Yet, withal, she was rather proud of her father's imperturbability. She tied on her small bonnet and the three went to eat. Potts Maury was now carrying two revolvers thrust through his belt. The general attention which would have been his was lessened by the news brought by Baylor's Texans. The war was very popular with the outcasts. It would relieve the monotony. It would permit of wide ranging.

Men were shouting invitations to one another to break through the eastern gate of Apache land and make for New Mexico or Texas. Even gambling was neglected this night. As the Maurys and Yuba were finishing their supper the tall Texan came along to their table and paused long enough to announce that his game was closed, as he was joining the Baylor outfit.

YUBA accompanied the Maurys to the girl's room and talked with them until a late hour. By this time Potts Maury seemed to sense the young man's efforts

in the girl's behalf, and he briefly expressed his appreciation. He did not seem to sense, however, that his daughter had suffered anything more serious than a few inconveniences. The Maurys were used to corners and tight places. The Maurys were expected to "pull through."

In brief, the Maurys were rather superior people. His daughter had suffered no harm. Even the Apache scout, with yucca shoots over his head, had been but a shadow of peril. It was obvious to the two younger people that, aside from the war, Potts Maury was engrossed with his Sixteenth Century armor and the enlightenment it might throw on the wanderings of the first Spanish explorers.

Quite incidentally—in truth he had forgotten it—he fished from the capacious inside pocket of his shirt a plate of hammered gold and tossed it on the couch, and explained:

"I know where there's a cord of such like. Stripped from some temple, so the Spaniards wouldn't find them. Interesting, but not of vital interest. I brought back the one, as one is as good as a ton in showing the Aztec gold smithing, with utility and decoration combined."

Yuba, round eyed, looked on the golden plate, then turned his bewildered gaze on the speaker. His life had been lived among men who would commit any crime to possess the precious metal. Miss Maury smiled spontaneously for the first time since entering the town.

"Isn't he wonderful?" she asked for the second time.

He did not hear her. He was thinking of Genna and Rames and Ventura and Rin Scoke and hundreds of their ilk, and wondering whether there was any evil any one of them would not loose on the world, or any crime he would not gladly commit, for the sake of learning Potts Maury's secret. Finally he asked—

"You don't plan to go back for a load of this stuff, Monte—Mr. Maury?"

"Only one contingency would impel me to make such a trip," blandly replied Maury. "The needs of the Confederate States of America. If I find our National Treasury is lacking in the yellow metal I will go back and bring out a mule train load. This one plate and the huge quantity I found so cunningly hidden has no historical significance beyond what I already know. But as soon as I am free from military service I shall eagerly return to seek more light on Fray Marcos de Ninza, who visited Cibola and six other wonderful cities, and to investigate more closely Hernando de Alercon's boat trip up the Colorado River."

He paused and tossed up his hands in a gesture of despair and cried:

"Good heavens! Why did this war have to come now? Just as I had secured proofs that Coronado came up the site of this very town by way of the Santa Cruz valley, and then marched northeast to where the Gila breaks through the mountains. If we could have had peace for another two or three years— Well, well. If men will fight, then knowledge must suffer wounds. Yuba, I shall raise a regiment. If you care for a captaincy it is yours, my boy. If only for your courtesy to Philena. With the war out of the way and our new republic on a stout foundation, you shall go with me to Mexico."

When Yuba departed the girl followed him to the door to whisper for the third time—

"Isn't he wonderful?"

"All that. But his daughter is more wonderful. Good night." The last was clipped short; he was marveling at his boldness.

THE DAY'S events had disrupted the routine of Tucson. The gamblers found their occupation gone. Under the nervous pressure of the hour even mescal seemed to have lost much of its potency. Yuba did not escape the nerve stimulation produced by the war news. Contrary to his custom, he was abroad early in the morning and hurrying to the alley. He met Potts Maury and Philena on their way to breakfast. Maury, bareheaded in defiance to the sun, and with the two big

revolvers thrust through his belt, strode the narrow streets with the tread of a conqueror. His mind was filled with high dreams, and beyond a mechanical smile of greeting he did not notice the young man. As for that, he seemed to have forgotten his daughter.

All Tucson was inclined to earlier rising this morning. Yuba noticed that thief and assassin politely gave way before the tall figure of Maury. One had to respect a man who alone could defy the Apache raiders and escape the Sonoran ruffians.

One of Baylor's Texans, with a telescope under his arm, was trying to climb on to a flat roof. Yuba dropped behind his friends to inquire—

"Anything new?"

"Dust down the stage road. Reckon Colonel Baylor's sending us reinforcements."

Yuba showed him an easy ascent and followed after him. There was dust in the southeast. The Texan used the glass and informed Yuba:

"Men on horseback. Must been sent by the colonel. You look."

Yuba quickly located the horsemen, animated dots at first. He watched their advance until they increased much in size, until he saw that the leader wore a flapping black cloak which suggested a gigantic bat. Then he handed over the telescope and said:

"Not Baylor's men. The man in the lead is Nunez the hated. Nearly a score ride behind him. Will your men fight?"

"But we're only five!" protested the Texan. "How many in Tucson will back us?"

"I don't know. I'll back you. But that Mexican is feared by Tucson."

The Texan quickly descended to the street and ran to find his comrades. Yuba hurried to the eating house where the Maurys were awaiting him. He tersely announced:

"Nunez is coming with twenty men. Forget the Spanish explorers, Montezuma. Think of your daughter. I shall try to hold Nunez back and kill him, if possible. You stay with Miss Maury in her room."

"Ah, that wicked Nunez!" murmured Maury. "I've heard much about him. I've seen him at a distance, south of the Border. A curious type. He has a sense of theatrical values. Dresses in black to make simple folk believe he is in league with the devil. Paralyzes some with fear. A fine example of a man determined, even to the point of insanity, to impress people with his superiority. But the governor of Sonora assures me he is baseborn. Still, he proves what ambition and a strong incentive can do. He rules over the ragtag until he can rule over a province. From the cruelties he inflicts on his victims, I've decided he's imbued with satanism. He resents his obscure introduction to life. It follows that he hates those in high places and of purer blood. He seeks compensation from the world."

"He will seek your daughter, once he sees her," fiercely whispered Yuba. "He will seek my life for killing Ventura, his right hand man. There are men here in Tucson who will serve him because they love his gold and fear his knife."

Potts Maury continued eating. He did not notice the girl's loss of color. He was not impressed by Yuba's dire prophecy. He smacked his lips appreciatively over the food and quietly said to the young man:

"Every equation can be solved. I'll have a talk with Nunez after I've eaten."

"Father, father, you don't understand!" whispered the girl.

He lowered his cup and stared at her wonderingly. There was gentle reproach in his voice as he told her:

"My dear, you've lost your faith in your father. It grieves me. Yet it's the way of youth to know more than their elders. How close is Señor Nunez, Yuba?"

"He should be here in twenty minutes, I reckon."

"Then let us enjoy our food. Concentrate on one thing at a time."

He resumed eating with much gusto, although his companions had but small

appetites. When he had finished and was rising from the table, the tall Texan hurried in and told Yuba:

"Nunez has gone into camp a quarter of a mile down the valley. The young woman oughter stay in till we can settle this fracas."

MAURY rose and stepped in front of the Texan and directed:

"Get together a dozen stout American cutthroats who will help Baylor's men stand off Nunez followers if they offer to come close. They must be prevented from entering the town and finding friends. While you're doing that, I will advise Nunez to ride south."

"Montezuma, you don't *sabe* that man," said the Texan. "He's a devil."

"He's only a superstition," sharply replied Maury. "He isn't sure of himself, or his men. Or he wouldn't wear a flapping cloak and treat his prisoners so cruelly. But we must credit him with building up that superstition very cleverly. He's just a state of mind. In old times many folks had many of them. One was that the world was flat."

Bending down, the Texan hoarsely whispered in Yuba's ear—

"What'n hell is he yappin' about?"

Yuba shook his head dubiously and started to leave the room. But Maury, quickened to action, seized the young man by the shoulder and pulled him back and took the lead. He repeated his instructions to the Texan and insisted:

"A dozen ruffians, plus Baylor's men, can easily keep them from town. Nunez is afraid to enter, or he'd done so at once."

The Texan ran to the street. Maury told Yuba:

"Take Philena to the room. Then round up some horses, so we can ride east. Nunez won't pay us a visit for awhile."

Yuba escorted Miss Maury to the room, where Marie, telling her beads, was waiting. Charging the two women to keep indoors, Yuba began looking for horses. The uselessness of securing mounts while Nunez was alive to give pursuit came into the young man's realization before he had located even one horse. He gave up his quest and went to find Maury.

The citizens were converging on the south side of the town. Some were spreading alarm by blood curdling warnings against any who opposed the outlaw. But the tall Texan, with ten choice gunmen, had reinforced the five men sent by Baylor and were ready to dispute any entrance to the town. Potts Maury, gazing benignly on the rabble, advanced beyond the Texans' position and stared speculatively at the group down the valley. Nunez's men had started no breakfast fires, he noted. His gaze quickened as one man withdrew from the group and slowly advanced up the valley. He was easily recognized as the leader by his black cloak. Maury watched Nunez curiously. He admired the man for what he had accomplished in the way of terrorism with the poor means at hand. History afforded many counterparts of just such bloodthirsty characters, who climbed high in power from similar petty and ruthless beginnings.

HALFWAY between his horsemen and the Tucson men Nunez halted and waved a white handkerchief. Potts Maury moved his two guns to the back of his belt and, with his hands on his hips, started toward the sinister figure. Yuba, just arriving on the scene, cried for him to come back. He would have run after him had not the Texan caught him by the shoulder. Maury halted long enough to call out—

"Let no man advance a step."

"He'll murder you," cried Yuba.

"Another silly superstition. I tell you to keep back."

"Let the old fool go!" some one yelled.

With his bare head held high Potts Maury briskly covered the distance and came to halt within ten feet of the swarthy face peering from under the black sombrero. The black cloak was no longer flapping, but closely enveloping the tall figure. The high cheek bones suggested

a red streak in his ancestry. The face was lean and weathered and the color of leather. His features were immobile. Only the black eyes were alive.

Speaking in Spanish, Potts Maury asked—

"What does Señor Nunez want here with a white flag?"

"I want to know what those men mean! I want to know if they're foolish enough to get in the path of Nunez. I want to know if they've forgotten that I have many friends in Tucson, that my man Ventura is there, ready to strike a knife in their backs if they do not scatter."

"Tucson is tired of you, Señor Nunez. Tucson is now a town of a new republic. It belongs to the Confederate States of America. Ventura is dead. Rames is dead. Genna is dead. Scoke is dead," said Maury slowly.

The lean, black figure jerked convulsively as Maury recited this necrology. Maury continued:

"There is room for more dead men, but there is no room for you alive, Señor Nunez. You have done well, but you have finished. You have the consolation of knowing that far greater, far more ambitious men than you, have come against the insurmountable obstacle."

"In the name of the black devil, what are you trying to tell me?" hissed Nunez.

"That your fire is going out. That your trail is ended. That, alive, you will never enter Tucson again," gently explained Maury.

The leathery hands, holding the cloak tightly together at neck and waist, began moving slowly. Likewise, Potts Maury's hands moved backward. Nunez's right hand vanished inside the cloak to jerk out a knife, and at the same instant Maury plucked a revolver from the back of his belt. The outlaw's arm drew back to cast the blade just as the .45 boomed with terrible finality. Nunez, the hated, the superstition, the idol of the baseborn, jerked backward. Then the knees buckled, and he plunged face down on the ground.

For a few seconds there was for once quiet on the outskirts of Tucson. Then deep throated voices exploded behind Maury. Almost as quickly, yells of furious amazement sounded from the outlaws' camp. Nunez's men rushed for their horses, although the distance separating them from the American could quickly be covered afoot. Maury refused to fall back and began firing with both guns. Two riderless horses were galloping wildly, and the dreaded band was but a parcel of cowardly fugitives by the time the Texans swept by Maury, charging on the camp.

Surrounded by the babbling Tucson men, Potts Maury turned to young Yuba and addressed him as if the two of them were alone. He said:

"Every equation can be solved. Now go and get horses. Any men here who want to ride with us to New Mexico are welcome."

Then he walked with Yuba, who was reluctant to leave the scene, and again he urged:

"The horses! Round up some horses! And you shall have a captaincy. You were courteous and helpful to my daughter. I know the child approves of you."

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

"Green Pebbles"

THOUGH the following letter is long for Camp-Fire, it is a splendid narrative of loyalty, vicissitude and adventure in the least known land left on this hemisphere. Also there is promise of a further tilt with fate and fortune—a mystery concerning those precious green stones. Comrade M— speculates upon the possibility of a treasure trove of emeralds, somewhere south of Yucatan. As it is his expressed wish, we print only his initials.

For almost three years, in fact since soon after I landed on the shores of this fair country, I have squatted in the shadows near "Camp-Fire," absorbing the wondrous tales of adventure narrated by those happy mortals who have roamed the far corners of the earth.

Duly cognizant of the fact that my knowledge of the language of the land is, as yet, very superficial I have, of course, remained a silent listener; but Mr. Arthur O. Friel's remarkable story "The Devil's Castle," concluded in *Adventure* of September 1st, affords me the only possible excuse I could offer for altering the *status quo*.

Mr. Friel's hero, Julian Mardeu, after harrowing vicissitudes, recovers from a hole in "Devil's Castle," near the Orinoco in Venezuela, a priceless treasure of gold and emeralds hidden there by his partner's ancestor.

The official information dispensed by the consuls from the Republic of Colombia everywhere is to the effect that the only place on earth where emeralds have ever been found is Colombia and, as I have been able to ascertain, no state in the world disputes their claim.

And yet—but I must give you first a few details that you may be better able to judge of what I shall proceed to say. I was born in the City of Mexico. Like Mr. Georges Surdez, who, *apropos*, is a prince of *raconteurs*, my father was French and my mother Spanish. In due course our family moved to Chilpancingo, the capital city of the Mexican State of Guerrero, where my father had established profitable business connections; but finding that the climate was all but salubrious it was decided that my mother and I return to Mexico City where we would receive periodical visits from my progenitor.

The State of Guerrero is, I believe, the least known part of Mexico with the possible exception of the Territory of Quintana Roo, south of Yucatan. Its topographical situation makes it well nigh inaccessible. In certain regions of the State Spanish is unknown, the Indians still using their ancestral dialects. Their customs are exceedingly primitive; they walk about naked but for a cloth around their loins. Supposedly Catholic they are, nevertheless, really pagan in their religious practices and lack of intercourse with the civilized Mexicans, through utter inadequacy of means for travel and transportation. This renders them astonishingly alien to their own countrymen. As a matter of fact their existence is patterned to almost every detail after the aboriginal customs of their pre-Columbian ancestors.

In July of 1925 my mother received word that my father was critically ill with a malignant fever. The long and arduous trip to my father's bedside in Chilpancingo was immediately decided upon; but finding it impossible to secure passage on any boat

from Colima to Acapulco, the nearest route, we were compelled to take the overland road. We journeyed to lovely Cuernavaca but from there on there was no railroad service available. After some delay we were able to secure the services of two Indian guides and the necessary horses and pack mules for our impedimenta.

The local *alcalde* and the military commander plainly disapproved and frowned upon our impending voyage. They jointly and separately tried to dissuade my mother from undertaking the long trip to distant Chilpancingo and the comandante went so far as to offer a military escort of five soldiers for our protection. However, my mother was adamant; and refusing the escort, the following dawn saw us departing, our ears still ringing with the direful prophecies of our well-meaning hosts. They could not conceive of a white woman of gentle birth venturing alone in the heart of the forbidding Guerrero Mountains, facing the unknown dangers of jungle and wild beast, deadly snakes and venomous insects, fevers and all the terrors of practically unexplored territory with only her fifteen-year-old son, myself, as companion and protector.

Of course, in our hosts' opinion our stolid and gloomy Indian guides could not be depended upon in any sort of emergency; but they failed to realize that a woman's devotion for her mate will bridge all obstacles and know no fear.

That memorable trip has remained engraved in my mind with searing characters. It was a veritable Iliad. Adventures befell us at every bend of that tortuous trail. The whole thing was kaleidoscopic. Savage, battlemented mountains; roaring torrents whose angry waters could be heard from high up but dimly seen through hazy veils of mist two thousand feet below; trails only wide enough to permit the passing of one mule, one half of whose load hung precariously over the abyss; almost impenetrable forests where with our faithful Indians' *machetes* we had to crash our way through; fearful *pintadas*, a yard long, for whose deadly bite it is said, there is no known antidote; centipedes forty centimeters in length by actual measurement; tarantulas as big as your fist; cougars that would dog our footsteps for days at a time; glorious sunsets and awe inspiring storms tremendous in their fury.

On one occasion torrential rains forced us to take shelter in a small cluster of mud huts tenanted by half a dozen Indians and their women. They regarded us with evident wonder; and their reverence and humility toward us was appalling to behold. That night one of the women rushed into our tent and with heartrending sobs deposited on my mother's lap the body of her little son. The youngster had gorged himself with a species of wild, poisonous berry, and now lay unconscious, critically ill, terrible convulsions racking his little body. The Indian woman smiled at my mother through her tears, knelt on the floor at one side and with child-like trust and simplicity asked my mother to make her son well. Emetic was forced through the child's teeth, a strong stimulant administered, and my mother sat up all night applying heat to the body of the small brown patient.

By morning the boy was fully conscious, weak as the proverbial kitten, but able to talk. And that evening the sturdy little rascal was romping about blissfully unaware of what a close call he had had.

Two days later, the fury of the storm abated somewhat and we prepared to leave, whereupon the youngster's mother came to where my mother stood supervising the loading of our baggage and, kissing her hand almost in a worshiping attitude, pressed upon my mother's palms what looked like three unpolished, beautifully green pebbles, one about the size of a marble and the other two much smaller. At the same time expressing in halting Spanish her eternal gratitude for her son's recovery. Knowing the abject poverty of these Indians my mother fancied these pebbles to be specimens of some valueless crystals, for in that uncut state these bits of stone did not betray their real worth to the eyes of the layman.

We arrived eventually at Chilpancingo, my father recovered, and we finally started back for Mexico City via south through Nicaragua and then north to Vera Cruz. Soon after our arrival at the Mexican capital mother came across the green stones and, captivated by their deep, beautiful green color, sent them to a leading jeweler of the city with orders to have them cut, polished and set in a breast pin.

Imagine our astonishment when my mother was informed that our green stones were flawless, perfect emeralds! At least, two of them were, for one of the smaller was found to have certain flaws. Of course, they had then to be cut as emeralds are always cut. The bigger emerald, after cutting and polishing weighed four carats and a fraction, and the others slightly under two carats. The largest one now graces the crown of one of the most reverend Madonnas of the Mexican Catholic Church; and the other two are still in my mother's possession.

I have repeatedly invited my mother, in France now for the last ten years, to do our Mexican trip again to locate, if possible, the source of the emeralds; but, as she puts it, she wouldn't go through one-tenth of what she went through that time for all the precious stones in the world.

As my father is dead I propose to go over the same route in Guerrero as soon as I graduate from college here, and see what I can find. It all happened twelve years ago but I still remember quite vividly all the places and incidents of that trip.

Now, several questions naturally come to one's mind.

Did the Guerrero Indians obtain these emeralds from some mine thereabouts, of whose location only themselves know?

Were the emeralds brought thither by some remote ancestor from the Inca empire in South America? Are there any more emeralds in the possession of the Indians?

As to the first question, that section of Guerrero being quite isolated by lack of means of communi-

cation, it is quite possible that the Mexican authorities have no knowledge of such mine there, if any. The Indian woman apparently thought nothing of parting with several thousand dollar's worth of emeralds, which may mean that emeralds are plentiful there or else that they do not know their value.

Regarding question number two, it is known that the Aztec empire once imcluded what is now Central America down to Panama and Colombia and Peru, the seat of the great Inca empire being comparatively near it is not at all improbable that some wandering warrior or trader brought these stones to Mexico in the days before Pizarro and Cortez.

Question number three: Undoubtedly there are more emeralds among those Indians who, I do not believe, would have been willing to part with these trinkets had they been the only ones in their possession. Ask the readers of the magazine and see what they think. No doubt there must be some among us who are qualified to advance a plausible, scientific theory.

The thing is worth investigating, in my estimation, and I long for the day in the near future when I shall embark in my thrilling quest for adventure and wealth—or will it turn to be all adventure and no emeralds?

Quien sabe? Of course, should you think it advisable to print any part of this letter, for whose unusual dimensions I apologize, do so by all means but please use only my initials if that should be compatible with your policy.

In closing I wish to congratulate you for our magnificent magazine, the best of its kind in the country but, *please*, give us more stories by Talbot Mundy, Georges Surdez, Harold Lamb and Bill Adams, the Big Four of *Adventure*.—C. R. N., Los Angeles, California.

Geography II

Vladivostok

Svetlandskaya Street. Spirits of Wine uneasy in bottles labeled "Vodka," for fear someone will strike a match. The ladies and gentlemen gamboling in the ocean together, wearing nothing but their birthday suits. Chinamen selling live, hard shell crabs. Measuring about a foot across the shell . . .

Chinwangtao

The Great Wall of China. Diminutive donkeys to take tourists mountain climbing. The railroad to Tientsin. Six-foot Chinamen. Eggs thirty cents a hundred . . .

Chefoo

A sea-coast summer resort patronized by Europeans domiciled in the interior of China. The mystery of the disappearing Chinese queues is solved. They are all here in hair net factories. The barber shop in which the clients are lathered with a tooth brush. The two Chinese men-of-war at anchor off the Naval Training Station . . .

Nagasaki

Every square inch of the hillsides under cultivation. The questionnaire to be filled out when registering at the Nagasaki Hotel. Sukiyaki joints in which sukiyaki is cooked and served on the floor by the chorus from "Madame Butterfly". Asihi beer, saki, and cigaret papers all made from rice . . .

Shanghai

The two hundred and twenty pound Sikh cop testing a ricksha by jumping on the handle bars and belaboring the seat and sides with his club. The modern drug store on Nanking Road owned and operated by a Chinese graduate of Yale. The European automobiles which look like kiddie-cars. The French Annamite cop who tried to see how far he could drop-kick a ricksha man . . .

Hankow

The lone Japanese, foreman of the machine shop in a Chinese shipyard, discussing Marco Polo with the Oxford educated Chinese superintendent. The Jap claimed that *Joss* was the best the Chinese could do with the word *Dios*, imported by Marco Polo . . .

Suez Canal

The splendid view of "The Garden of Allah." The searchlight operators in their box slung over the bow of the vessel. The native boys running along the banks shouting "*Baksheesh.*" The statue of Des Lesseps at the Port Said entrance . . .

Beirut

The Turkish cruiser sunk inside the breakwater. Turkish towels manufactured in New England. The palatial residences deserted by their owners and temporarily occupied by "ladies of joy." The oil tanks on the beach demolished by shells from a French cruiser . . .

Piraeus

The battleships *Kilkis* and *Lemnos* at anchor. Formerly the old *Idaho* and

Mississippi. The statuesque German lady musicians doing their best to entertain about fifty more or less inebriated individuals, in a waterfront saloon. The diver in the dilapidated diving suit diving for coal purposely pushed overboard from a lighter while coaling a vessel. The fast electric trains to Athens . . .

Athens

The electric trains run between the Acropolis and Parthenon on their way into Athens. Statues of Bacchus. Must have been a prominent citizen. The American Chief Engineer of the Greek Navy. The Pantechnicon. Greek soldiers wearing white flannel kilts. Hennessey, the "three star" man, very popular here . . .

Rhodes

Snappy looking Italian soldiers. The channel leading into the inner harbor, which the Colossus is said to have spanned. The saloon with the cake of ice slung outside in the hot sun to advertise the fact that cold beer was sold inside. The proprietor of the same saloon, who, as soon as he got a bottle cold, carried it around for all hands to feel, to prove that it was cold . . .

Malta

The green and white British naval dockyard at Valetta. The women wearing the "Veil of Shame" on the Strada Real. The seven foot British sentry pacing back and forth in front of the Governor's Palace. The Chapel of Skulls, the walls of which are covered with human skulls, in some of which bullet holes are visible. The skulls are said to be those of Napoleon's soldiers . . .

Dream Dust

Old Pop Smiley can look across his dreams
And see a thousand wagons in the dust of many teams;

Sit still and listen to the sounds of other years,
And hear the yokes a-creaking on the necks of tugging steers;

Hear the groans of dying men and smell burnt powder,
Hear the redskins galloping closer in and louder;

Know again an arrow's sting, sense a bullet's breath,
Think the thoughts a man thinks, and he facing death.

Old Pop Smiley was a freighter on the Trail—
Face year-wrinkled and his eyes age-pale,

Knew the look of wagon tracks toward the western sun;
How to guard a lone camp when the day was done.

From Dodge across the prairies to the hills of Santa Fé,
He knew the toil and dangers of the long, lone way.

Sitting in his chair, now, weak and old and humble,
Into his old heart the old days tumble.

Wagon phantoms creaking by, old dream dust—
Call him to a lone trail. Go he must.

Old Pop Smiley with his body-heart at rest,
Follows phantom wagons to a far new West!

—S. OMAR BARKER.

Cadiz

The young ladies who went out and brought in the neighbors to look at our gold teeth. The sailor who scattered a handful of copper coins underneath the tables and chairs outside a cafe, and the fifty, more or less, street urchins who capsized tables, chairs, and clients scrambling to pick them up . . . —PETER MORGAN.

Ten Dollars' Worth of Pork.

AND AS the native meat sells for eight cents a pound, choice cuts, the weight of it an American eagle can purchase, will feed a goodly ship's company on tenderloins.

Mr. Whitener's letter in a recent issue of *Adventure* comments on *chancha*, meaning pig. It was familiar enough to me. The first time I ever heard of it was in Callao, Peru. One of the sailors "on" the ship had made the discovery that he could talk Spanish by the simple expedient of putting an 'o' on the end of any English word. Having a gold piece and wanting change, he went to the nearest store, a meatmarket, and said "Change-o". The butcher appeared a bit worried at first, then came back with some pork, "*chancho*."

I looked up the word in some of the dictionaries I have. The smaller ones, it is true, do not contain it; some use the derivative *chanchullo*, in the sense of "dirty work." But both Alemany and the Academy Dictionary contain it in masculine and feminine forms. I believe, however, that it is more common in South America than in Spain.

Your changed magazine is certainly more attractive. I like your present artists. Also most of your writers. H. Bedford-Jones or Mundy's name on the cover sells me a copy every time.

One continued story at a time is plenty. There must be lots of people like me who never read them and grudge the space.—WILLIS K. JONES, *Assoc. Prof. of Romance Languages*, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio.

Tom Curry

WELL KNOWN in other publications, Mr. Curry presents in this issue his first *Adventure* short story, "Jungle Jewels." And, according to custom, he rises to introduce himself.

I started out to be a chemical engineer, and held to that course for three years. In the summers I traveled here and there.

But writing I fancied beyond the laboratory; I dropped the test tube for the typewriter.

I have visited the tropics, and been here and there, recording and remembering. I know rotary drilling. Maracaibo intrigues me. There it is, the great lake, one hundred and forty miles long, sixteen million acres of jungle and water in all, under which lie mighty reservoirs of oil.

In these Maracaibo yarns I have a silent partner, a man who drilled there and knows the terrific grind of the great race for oil. He contributes much technical advice, and some description.

I intended adventuring in the semi-tropics this winter, again; but a house out here, set in the Connecticut hills, was impossible to resist. I bought it, and cancelled my passage. Hence, this winter I will be shivering in snow, instead of sweating in the tropical sun, by the sea. But there will be other winters.—TOM CURRY.

Play Ball!

THE WINDOWS of my office are thrown wide to the balm of spring. Down on the broad roof of the next office building—judging by the incense heavy on the warm breeze, they manufacture Djer Kiss perfume there!—a dozen joyful, harum-scarum tomboys, from fifteen to fifty, are playing "scrub" with a tennis ball and an old squash racquet. I watch—and grin a little ruefully. Just *why* was it I swore off baseball forever, back there that dismal fall of 1919 in Cincinnati? Somehow it's a little vague, a trifle hard to remember on a glorious day like this . . . Those really aren't skirts, are they, fluttering down there? No, shadows . . . Three-Finger Brown and Big Six Matty are warming up . . . the Giants 'll get theirs *this* aft! . . . Tinker to Evers to Chance . . . Jack Chesbro and Ed Walsh? Two spitters? Let 'er *go!* Orvie Overall, Doc White, Wild Bill Donovan, Nick Altrock, Slim Sallee, Chief Bender, Eddie Plank . . . too much Johnson . . . Nap Lajoie and his Injuns . . . *which* Covaleski is 'th Detroit this year? . . . Pop Anson, grim and white haired, down in a box where he can razz Fielder Jones and his "Hitless Wonders" . . . Jiggs Donohue . . . Frank Shulte . . .

Shucks! They pass. The sun is shining. I don't know a single face on one of the baseball clubs now; but the way I feel today, for the opening game *one* of them surely *is* going to sell a pair of first base box seats to—ANTHONY M. RUD.

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Will you kindly give me some data or general information about prospecting for gold or silver?

Where do you think would be a good place to try my luck for a year or two?"—J. C. ROBBINS, Harlan, Ky.

Reply, by Mr. Victor Shaw:—In general, the coastal field of British Columbia is excellent for the prospector, for the reason that thousands of miles of mineralized ground is comprised in the islands and land adjacent to tidewater on the mainland which is easily reached by small boat. This affords the best method of travel anywhere, and the abundant game, fish, clams, crabs and birds (grouse, ducks and wild geese) make living a small problem. Hence I am recommending this area to you instead of any inland point, which requires pack animals needing to be cared for and fed, as well as the consequent location of your claim, good or poor, at a great distance from a railhead.

This last point is a main issue in prospecting. The farther you go from cheap transportation facilities, the richer your claim must be; and at any distance your mine must be either a placer of rich deposit or a lode claim of easily worked free milling gold to concentrate on the ground, for bullion can only be packed out at a profit. Along this coast many a claim of $25 ore may be worked at a big profit which would prove worthless in the interior.

There are several local points, or more favorable areas known from work already done, although almost any of the ground from Vancouver north to Skagway is mighty good ground. All points included have same advantages of plenty of big game, fur, fish, fowl and timber, with ease of reaching the regular steamer lines to Seattle, from the numerous ports.

The British Columbia coast from Vancouver to the Portland Canal is excellent prospecting country especially around the mouth of the Skeena Canal. The whole coast has cool summers and mild winters, being very like the winters in States of Washington and Oregon. Many good mines already discovered. For detailed data write Minister of Mines, Wm. Sloan, at Victoria, B. C., asking for his Report for 1926, the last issued. Also ask for British Columbia, The Mining Province of Canada—both mailed free, with the latter giving summary of Canadian mining law with all fees.

Another fine country is that in Alaska lying 20 to 30 miles up either the Unuk or Chickamin Rivers, both about 75 miles from Ketchikan. That territory lies in the mineralized belt of same character as that in which is located the famed Premier Mine, at Stewart, B. C., the largest and richest mine in Canada. Both rivers are swift and hard to ascend, even in a canoe or flat river boat and should be tried in April before high water. Plenty of galena with silver, copper, in addition to gold and probably platinum and palladium.

The best area right now, bar none, I think, is the Cassiar, extending northerly from Dease Lake, which is 75 miles by wagon road from Telegraph Creek, at the head of the Stikine River. Route is via steamer from Seattle to Wrangel, Alaska; then via river boat up Stikine Canyon to T. C. the outfitting point in B. C. Placer and lode gold, with other minerals; plenty of game with winters cold and snowy but not excessive. Get maps and full data from Dep't of Mines, Ottawa, Canada.

Should have $1000 stake for Cassiar; half that for points south.

Aiguillettes

BADGES prescribed originally to distinguish Staff officers. The French fourragère.

Request:—"I would appreciate any informarion you would care to send me regarding the wearing, history of, and regulations governing the wearing of military aiguillettes in the U. S. Army. This also includes citation cords."—D. MATTHEWS, Cleveland, Ohio.

Reply, by Lieutenant Glen R. Townsend:—Aiguillettes appear to have been introduced in our Army for the first time in 1832. In order No. 50, issued from the Headquarters of the Army at Washington on June 11 of that year, aiguillettes are prescribed under the heading of "Badges to Distinguish Rank" for "Staff Officers, general as well as regimental, except in the Topographical Engineers." It is prescribed also that "aiguillettes of General Staff officers will be of twisted gold cord with gilt engraved tags, worn on the right shoulder under the epaulet." For the regimental staff they were to be made of "twisted gold and silver cord with gilt tags" and in this case also were to be worn on the right shoulder under the epaulet.

The following year aiguillettes similar to those worn by the general staff were prescribed (Order No. 10, dated Feb. 9) for field officers and the commissioned staff of dragoons. This continued in effect for some five or six years and appears to be the only instance where aiguillettes have been prescribed for wear by other than staff officers, their use by field officers of dragoons being the exception. For staff officers the regulations were unchanged until 1851 when some radical changes in the uniform were made by General Order No. 31 of that year. Shoulder straps and chevrons as badges of rank for commissioned officers and non-commissioned officers respectively were then adopted and aiguillettes were no longer authorized.

This distinctive badge of the staff officer was absent from our uniform throughout the Civil War period and was not reinstated in the Army until 1872, at which time shoulder knots were first prescribed for wear by all officers and aiguillettes were authorized for wear by officers of the Adjutant Generals' department, the Inspector General's department, Aides-de-Camp and Regimental Adjutants. They were to be of gold cord and attached to the right shoulder knot. Only minor changes appear to have been made in the regulations with reference to the wearing of aiguillettes from this time until the World War when aiguillettes again disappeared with the discontinuance of the dress uniforms. One of these changes, however, moved the aiguillettes from the right to the left shoulder for all officers authorized to wear it except the Chief of Staff and the Aides to the President.

The French fourragère is the only citation cord authorized for wear in our Army. Under French regulations the fourragère, in various colors, is awarded to organizations of their own or allied armies whose colors have been decorated for conspicuous service, the colors of the fourragère depending upon the number of decorations conferred upon the organization. This decoration, in all cases in the colors of the Croix de Guerre, was awarded a number of units of our Army serving in France in the World War and accepted in their behalf by the United States Government.

As it is both an organizational and an individual decoration the fourragère is worn by all members of any organization to which it has been awarded even though they join long afterward. But such individuals wear the decoration only so long as they are members of the organization. Individuals actually present when the requisite number of citations were made may continue to wear the decoration after ceasing to be a member of the organization.

Silver

TWO METHODS of reducing it.

Request:—"What method of silver mining was used in Chihuahua ten years ago? Is the same method employed at the present time? Is the 'patio' method in which burros are driven through the ore fluid used in any part of Mexico now?" —MARJORIE SCHLEGEL, Napa, Cal.

Reply, by Mr. J. W. Whiteaker:—There are two popular methods of reducing silver ore in Mexico. The most popular is known as the Patio Process, invented by Bartolome de Medina, a Spanish miner. The system, which is economical and effective, is on the principle of amalgamating the metal with quicksilver. The other one used by the Mexican miners is the Lixiviation Process, or that of crushing the dry rock and then roasting it in a reverberatory furnace with salt.

Mucklucks

SKIN boots that are naturally waterproof.

Request:—"I would like to find out where I can buy a pair of skin boots. I have heard that these boots used by the Eskimos are made with the hair inside and are very warm.

If you could tell me where to get them and the approximate cost I would be grateful."—EMORY A. NELSEN, Jamaica, L. I., N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. Theodore S. Solomons:—Various sorts of skin boots are made by the Eskimos—of seal, reindeer (or caribou) and some with white whale (Beluga) soles. They are made with the oil left in them or partly so, or with a dry tan, depending on whether they are wanted for wet summer use or dry winter wear. The common boot or muckluck is reddish brown or brown, quite dark, made of seal and scraped and pliable but not tanned. The bottom is of the thicker part, at the back, the rest of thinner skin; it is short sometimes, but more usually of knee length and is quite watertight. The same boot with the hair inside is warmer and still waterproof.

Write the Chamber of Commerce, Seattle, for Alaskan or Seattle dealers in mucklucks. That Chamber of Commerce maintains an Alaska Bureau to which all inquiries of this sort are referred.

Silencer

YOU COULD fire a .22, thus equipped, over a man's shoulder, without his being aware of the shot.

Request:—"Please give me some general information on the silencer for small guns, with special reference to its effect on aim, penetration of bullet, with its use as compared to that without it, and its actual silencing power.

If you can tell me where they can be obtained in the .22 size I will appreciate it.

I have in mind the use of one on a .22 Colt Automatic for indoor practice. Is it advisable?"—C. L. DILL, New Orleans, La.

Reply, by Mr. Donegan Wiggins:—My experience with the Maxim Silencer is not extensive; I used a .22 Remington rifle equipped with one, to a small extent, but never experimented with the ones in heavy calibers.

They occasioned a lower point of impact of bullet, and with a smokeless powder killed the report perfectly; I've fired over a man's shoulder without his knowing it, with the .22. The ballistics were all right, as far as I could judge. The weight of the silencer held the muzzle down a bit, that was all. Killing power on small game was not affected.

Unfortunately, the silencer is no longer made; you might find one in some dealer's stock and have it put on the pistol, and use smokeless powder with good results, however. I may add that I use the Crosman rifle indoors, and have great sport as well as keeping in trim.

Fishing Tackle

VARNISH your rod with Valspar, and keep it away from the steam heat.

Request:—"1. What are the proper methods for care of rod, reel and tackle? How often should a split bamboo rod be revarnished and rewrapped?

2. What is the proper way to tie a leader so that it pulls upon itself and not upon the knot? (I have asked about fifty supposed to be fishermen but haven't gotten an answer yet.)

3. What is the best method of varnishing a rod?

4. What is the best bait to use for halibut, yellowtail, spot-fin, Jewfish and tuna and sea bass in Southern California waters?

5. What is the best kind of sinker to use for pier or still fishing? I have been using a 6 oz. pyramid sinker with the point down. Is that correct?

6. What is the best size hooks to use for general pier fishing and what is the best length for the leader?

7. What is the best low priced or medium priced line to use for ocean fishing?"—LYMAN H. WOLFF, Ventura, Calif.

Reply, by Mr. John B. Thompson:—1. A split bamboo rod ought to be varnished with good Valspar varnish each season, but not wrapped unless the windings show signs of fraying.

2. Tie a knot, then the loop where you want the knot to hold and pull tight while gut is still wet.

3. I varnish a rod with my finger, and keep rods away from steam heat.

4. Best bait is herring, smelt and sardines; flying fish for the larger game fish.

5. Best still fishing sinker is the pyramid. Point down.

6. Any size according to weight of fish from No. 2 to 12/0. No standard size of leader, suit yourself in that respect; they run from 6 to 36 inches, as a rule.

7. Nothing surpasses the Cuttyhunk lines for salt water fishing.

Cat Meat

WHY YOU will find no alley cats in certain parts of South America. The requisites for conducting this novel form of feline execution seem to be a thirty-foot rope and a strong constitution. Of the latter, an even stronger one must be essential to enter into the spirit of the feast.

Request:—"I have heard somewhere that cats are extensively eaten in South America and would like to know all about it. If this is a verity and not some newspaper canard I would like to ask the following queries:

1. How are they killed and prepared for eating? As a boy I was one of a group, many years since, who were pranked into eating stewed cat. It had a rank taste. A few bites were all it needed to identify it as cat and not rabbit or hare.

2. Do they stew or roast their cats? Is the entire body used or just portions? I have heard that the

head muscles of any cat do not have the characteristic taste of the other parts.

3. Are the cats fattened before killing or are they merely seized and killed? If so, how is infection, etc., from their rat eating and other nasty habits guarded against?

4. Are they served in hotels and restaurants or is it a private feast? Or did the report arise, erroneously, from some famine years ago when they ate cats as the Chinese ate rats during a siege centuries ago and which gave rise to the report that they ate rats constantly?"—J. M. C., Vancouver, B. C.

Reply, by Mr. Edgar Young:—Cats are not extensively eaten in South America but the custom is fairly common in certain parts; so much so that cats are highly prized and guarded. You will find no cats running loose in these districts. What few you will be able to see will be in pens, in process of being fattened for the table. The male cats, or toms, are generally castrated when young and some house cats I have seen had grown to almost double the size of those that had been allowed to run free. Now to answer you specifically:

1. The killing of a cat for the table is quite a process and it is always done this way in Uruguay and the northern portion of Argentine and certain districts of Paraguay where they are eaten. I do not know of any other portion of S. A. where they are eaten. The cat is taken out to a post. A rope, or lariat, about thirty feet long is fastened about the neck in the form of a single knot or running noose close up to the post. The man, woman, or whoever is killing the cat then walks to the far end of the rope and by pulling on the rope throttles and chokes the cat. The reason for this is that the cat is forced in this manner, through pain and fright to empty its bladder in the death struggle. The long rope is evidence that sometimes a shower of urine awaits the strangler. It is a very cruel method and the same one that is used for killing yaks in Tibet; I do not know for the same reason or not.

Next the cat's head is cut off at the neck so that it will bleed freely. The feet are cut off at the first joint and the cat is skinned. A hole is dug and skin, feet, and head are buried in it. This appears to always be done. The cat is gutted and cleaned, the lights, liver, etc., being saved, the offal being discarded, naturally, as it is quite offensive. The animal is then ready for cooking.

2. Both. The entire body minus the feet, head, etc., as stated above. It is stewed with garlic or peppers. If roasted it is roasted gaucho style over an open fire on a spit, in the same manner pumas are roasted, or to be more accurate rib roasts and leg roasts from pumas.

3. Usually fattened on table scraps and raw meat or beef which is very cheap in this portion of the world.

4. They are more or less of a delicacy and privately cooked. They are so much prized I doubt if restaurants could obtain a supply. I understand the custom came from Spain. I have seen old country Spaniards in the very act of eating cat meat in Uruguay and have heard they are much prized in certain portions of the old country for table use. Might I also say that I ate cat meat twice in Uruguay, before I knew what I was eating? It was very good but the thought of the thing almost made me heave it up afterwards.

Waterproofing

A FORMULA that renders canvas simultaneously mildewproof, and almost fireproof, too.

Request:—"What is the best treatment to make a tent waterproof?"—DICK MARS, Berkeley, Calif.

Reply, by Mr. Charles Bell Emerson:—The best waterproofing for your tent is to make up a solution of the following, viz:

1 gallon of tepid water
1 pound of sugar of lead
1 pound of alum

Stir until dissolved, then soak the little tent in this solution and hang it up until thoroughly dry. This will make the canvas waterproof, mildewproof, and almost fireproof.

Caution: sugar of lead is POISON, so if you get any of the solution on your hands, be sure and wash them before touching anything to eat.

HERE is a monograph on "The United States Marine Corps," by Frederick W. Hopkins, First Lieutenant, F.M.C.R. This will later be published in circular form, and copies may be obtained by addressing Lieutenant Hopkins.

THE United States Marine Corps was formed on November 10, 1775, being authorized by an act of Continental Congress. Two battalions were formed at this time, the first armed forces of the Continental Government, and the only ones today having an unbroken history directly from that day. They were then called American Marines and their uniforms were green coats, cocked hats and white breeches. John Paul Jones, on his ship the *Bon Homme Richard,* dressed his Marines in blue coats. In 1776 these battalions were directed to join Washington's Army, and took part in the action at Trenton. They, with a body of regular troops raised by Washington, formed the backbone of the Army in our war for Independance.

Their first expeditionary force was in Florida during the Seminole War, where they served with the Army. They won great honors in our war with the Barbary pirates and made the world hear for the first time of the American Navy. They formed part of the column that marched (too late) to the rescue of our Capitol, Washington, D. C., during the war of 1812, and aided General Jackson at New Orleans. At Chapultapec, Mexico, they aided in the capture of the City of Mexico, and the red stripe on

their trousers commemorates this. About this time they changed the uniforms to the blue with red facings, so well known today.

They fought in the Civil War. They have fought against Chinese, Japanese, cannibals and American Indians, and having landed many times to pacify some revolutionary muddle in South America. They took active part in the Spanish American War, and Philippine Insurrection, the Boxer Rebellion, and at Panama and Nicaragua. They pacified Haiti and Santo Domingo and gave these countries their first stable government in a century.

Marines have penetrated Korea and Abyssinia. They have seen the four corners of the world and all the seas between. In the World War the Marine brigade in the 2nd Division of the Army in France helped make history, and the Battle of Belleau Wood is known to all.

The standards and colors of the Marine Corps represent battles, skirmishes and affrays under every sky.

Today, the Marines carry on. They form the guards on all the capital ships, battleships, flagships, many cruisers and gunboats. They form guards at Naval Stations and Navy Yards, Naval Hospitals, ammunition depots and supply bases. They garrison Guam, the Virgin Isles, parts of the Philippines and Hawaii, Haiti and Santo Domingo. There are Marines in Panama, Samoa and Guantanamo, Cuba. There is a strong legation guard at Pekin, China, and at Managua, Nicaragua. Also today Marines are in the field against outlaws in Nicaragua trying by force of arms to bring peace to a war torn country. They are guarding life and property in China and have stood shoulder to shoulder beside England's gallant Coldstream Guards against the mob.

THE PAY of the Marine is small and the duty great. Privates get $21.00 a month, privates 1st Class $30, corporals $45, and sergeants $54.00. Each man has a chance to qualify on the rifle range, and add from $2.00 to $5.00 a month additional to his pay. Bandsmen, clerks and other special duty men draw extra pay, as do cooks and messmen. There is no kitchen police in the Corps; men are paid and detailed for kitchen duty. Extra police duty is given as a punishment instead, and consists of gardening and general handy work about the garrison. The quarters and food are as a rule excellent, and the clothing is provided for in an extra money allowance for this purpose. Careful men can save some money on this account. Savings accounts with the paymaster are also encouraged and interest paid.

Applicants for enlistment must be unmarried, without physical defects, with good teeth, good eyes and general good health. They must be free from all skin disease and other complaints, and have good feet and bones. Enlistment age is between 21 and 30, except that young men between 18 and 21 may enlist provided thay have the unqualified consent of both parents or guardian, and present a birth certificate or affidavit of date of birth.

All original enlistments are for four years, as a private. No definite promises about anything regarding duty, pay, promotion or assignments can be made by any one to the applicant, except that he stands in line with any other Marine. At times men may be especially enlisted for band duty, as buglers, or for aviation, as the Service needs.

Every applicant must be able to read and write, have a fair education and produce letters of recommendation from responsible people. No man ever convicted of a crime, or released by the police on his promise to enlist, will be accepted. Time lost through intemperate use of liquor, absence without leave and confinement, must be made up before discharge.

Guard duty is usually steady, and as a rule a man will be on guard almost as much as off duty, with a drill every day. However, when a man is off duty, he is OFF, and may go on liberty (pass) every evening until next morning, unless due to mount guard or for other duty. Faithful and steady soldiers are rewarded upon expiration of enlistment with a medal and especial favors if they re-enlist.

THE United States Marine Corps is directly under the command of the major general commander, who is a bureau chief under the direction of the Secretary of the Navy. The motto of the Corps, "*Semper fideles*" (Always faithful), was awarded in recognition of their 150 years of loyal service, and of the fact that they in all their history have never suffered a defeat nor participated in a mutiny or revolt. They are proud of their long honorable history, and the tolerant scorn of the "old-timer" for all things not of the Corps is often misunderstood by the civilian and some Army men.

Many fine men have been Marines, and many who have in civil life achieved fame were young men in the Corps once. One of our best novelists, as well as a well known former Cabinet member, were once enlisted men in the Corps.

The personal achievements of Marines form a list too long to mention.

The Marine Corps Institute is a correspondence school conducted by the Corps upon the lines of the International Correspondence Schools, offering every course offered by the ICS, and whose certificate of graduation is honored as of equal merit. These courses are given free of all charge to any Marine desiring to improve his education or to prepare himself for a trade in civil life.

The Marine Corps Reserve is a component part of the Corps, and the various classes of the Fleet Reserve or of the Volunteer Reserve offer almost unlimited choice for the man who desires to belong to a reserve force and who may or may not be able to give to it much time from his civil occupation and life.

Any recruiting sergeant or officer will give truthful and complete information to any one who asks, whether he is an applicant for enlistment or is just frankly curious.

The TRAIL AHEAD

The next issue of ADVENTURE

Three *Complete Novelettes*

Murder Aboard Ship

By H. Bedford-Jones

Mr. Abbot, the trader, stood beside the wheelhouse, smoking a Dutch cheroot. Sardonically he addressed the ship's new skipper: "Who d'you suppose was back of the captain's murder? A man isn't knifed for fun. I told him yesterday to look out for trouble. That teakwood chest he put in the strong room has brought trouble with it. He was first. You'll be next. Then's my turn . . ."

Lucky Dog

By Bill Adams

The new gold braid on the third mate's sleeve made his uniform seem all the more shabby by comparison and *Roddy* looked at him with contempt. *Roddy* was second mate. *Roddy* was smart, he was. *Roddy* would some day be skipper of a crack liner. That was *Roddy's* opinion. There were other opinions, such as those of the steward and the chief engineer; and they were developed sharply on a day when the walls of green water rose against the old *Limpopo*, and the propeller shaft cracked, and the cry was, "Every man for himself!"

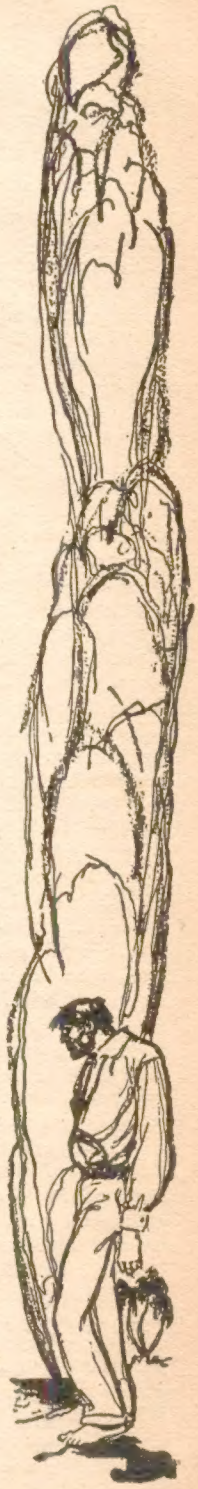
Soldier's Luck

By Larry Barretto

The night was mad with the crash of guns. The German infantry debouched from the woods, advancing slowly, relentlessly. Behind a crumbling old farmhouse wall, gallant in their grim determination that the enemy should not pass, waited three French artillerymen by a discarded seventy-five, an idiot farm boy armed with a butcher knife, and two American ambulance drivers, lost, hungry, by necessity A.W.O.L. and more worried at the prospect of facing their hardboiled lieutenant than the oncoming gray host of the Germans.

And—*Other Good Stories*

Conclusion of TEXAS MAN, a novel of wild days in early Arizona, by WILLIAM MACLEOD RAINE; OCCIDENTAL'S PRODIGAL, a humorous Western story, by JAMES STEVENS; THE FLOP, a story of the air, by ANDREW A. CAFFREY; POISON GOLD, a story of desert vengeance, by CHARLES E. BARNES; THE BELLS OF TYONG-KO, white men and Chinese sorcery, by STEWART ROBERTSON; LEE OF RIMROCK, Southern chivalry on the Western ranges, by HENRY HERBERT KNIBBS; DOMINGO, the spirit of the Marines, by LEE ROBINSON; HOW GUNMEN GET THAT WAY, a challenge to the Pecos dude, by FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE; GAUCHO SUNDAY, a colorful article on the knights of the pampas, by EDGAR YOUNG.



The Border Line

A Novelette of the West by RAYMOND S. SPEARS

There is no one today who brings back the days of the Old West with more clarity than Raymond S. Spears. Through intimate contact and close study he has known the West in its various phases. And this story of the last stand of the Bad Men and an Indomitable Man of Law is one of his best. It's complete in the April EVERYBODY'S.

Wonder Dokters of the Zambezi

E. VAN LIER RIBBINK'S Tale of Rhodesia

The search for gold has a world-around allure. It may lead to the farthest north or under equatorial suns, but, magnet-like it will draw men through unbelievable dangers. So it isn't surprising that men would brave the jungles of darkest Rhodesia, the gleaming Assagais of the Zulus for the fabled treasures of Solomon. Mr. Ribbink's story of the search is complete in the April EVERYBODY'S.

And two engrossing serials by Basil Carey and Hugh Pendexter; short stories by Ared White, Reginald Campbell, Henry LaCossitt, Jim Fellom, Pollok Guiler and Sewell Peaslee Wright. All in

Everybody's

April 25c *Out* March 20th

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If all cigarettes were as good as Camel you wouldn't hear anything about special treatments to make cigarettes good for the throat. Nothing takes the place of choice tobaccos.

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